

Sickness

By: Blueberry-Valentine

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1. Chapter 1

I'm back! It's been over three years since I wrote for this fandom. Are you guys still up and running? I certainly hope so. I love you all lots, and I hope you still love Death Note as much as I do.

Also in the past three years I wrote a book? If you're interested, PM me and I'll show you where to find it.

I'll be updating once a week for about the next two months, so this is going to be a pretty substantial fic. I wasn't planning on it exploding into such an enormous project, but I'm also definitely not complaining because the past several months of writing have been a blast.

In this chapter, there's a scene about halfway through with a possible tw: suicide, so heads up for that. On another note, the paper referenced in the scene right before it is based on Reasonable Doubt: Toward a Postmodern Defense of Reason as an Educational Aim by Nicholas C. Burbules, a personal favorite of mine, so you should all go check that out sometime.

Much thanks to my long-time beta, chibi-hime123, who is super rad.

Of course, I do not own Death Note, Reasonable Doubt, or Hamlet.

Thanks so much, buckle your seat belts, and enjoy. :)

L wouldn't stop staring at him. It wasn't so much the staring in and of itself as much as it was the secretiveness with which L was doing it.

Light would be punching data into the program he had written, trying desperately to pinpoint a pattern in the temporal distribution of Kira's murders, and then he would see it: L, no longer clicking or scrolling or typing, instead eating little bear-shaped cookies at an absently mechanical pace, straining to maximize his peripheral vision, concentrating so intently on this visual task that he didn't even notice when his fingertips eventually met an empty box.

It was only when Light was so distracted that he entered a column of data incorrectly for the third time that he snapped. A sigh, brisk and cold. A slow kneading at the bridge of his nose. Quickly and quietly, "Ryuzaki, do you need something?"

The typing started up again before Light had even gotten all the way through the question. "No." His voice was a slow, careful monotone. "Though I must ask... Yagami-kun, have you recently experienced a craving to eat ice, dirt, or paper?"

Light had certainly recently experienced a craving to heave L over his shoulders and throw him out the nearest window, handcuffs and all. Instead, he settled for rubbing hard at his temples and closing his eyes. Staring at a computer screen for twenty hours a day was starting to get to him. He fortunately had twenty-ten vision, so he had acuity to spare, but he very much wasn't pleased with the headaches.

"Should I interpret your silence as an ashamed affirmative? Yagami-kun, you have nothing to be—"

"No, Ryuzaki. You should interpret my silence as a *no*."

Part of the reason L could get away with forcing Light to stay up so obscenely late was that sleeping had become—well, *taxing*, to say the least. Sometimes Light wondered whether he was getting any genuine rest at all, or whether his nights had become a time-consuming mockery that only served to place Kira's capture another few hours away.

"Good night, Ryuzaki," Light said, turning out the lamp on his bedside table. This left the only light in the room as the glaring fluorescence of L's laptop. L was huddled close to the screen, as if it were a fire, expressionlessly skimming some unknown paper. "Are you getting any sleep tonight?"

L looked hard at Light, frowning through the sheer force of his gaze, and the sight of Light tucked under the covers in his pajamas seemed to answer

the question. "No," he said. His gaze went back to the screen, flicking back and forth rapidly, eyes still hard. The laptop screen was definitively turned so that Light couldn't see a thing. L bit at his thumb, viciously. Something was wrong.

But Light was in no mood to ask. "Suit yourself." He yanked the covers over his shoulders and closed his eyes and reprimanded his thudding heart and ordered himself to sleep well and soundly. He was a full-grown man. He was leading the most important criminal investigation the world had ever seen. He had scored perfectly on his university entrance exam. He was *not* about to be driven out of his mind by a handful of bad dreams.

Unfortunately, none of this mattered the moment he fell asleep.

Nothing *happened* in the dreams, which made them all the worse. It always began with a creature, winged and skeletal and grinning, approaching. Or, rather, *he* was approaching the creature, but he could do nothing to stop himself. As he approached, the creature became enormous, massive as a skyscraper, and its grinning maw became a silent scream into which he entered.

The creature didn't eat him. It wasn't anything nearly so straightforward. In fact, he walked into the scream and came right out the other side. But the creature had changed him, and the world into which he exited was different every time, but always it was sick.

This time, there was a small dog, sitting on a branch in a tree, and its head swelled up, like a balloon filling with sand, until the neck snapped under the tremendous weight and the engorged head fell off. A new one grew in its place. Light walked right past it.

There was a man climbing a ladder onto a rooftop, but he was nothing but a ribcage and fleshy arms. His heart was pumping blood and it was spilling out through the ribs and falling to splatter on the ground. When the heart had exhausted its supply, the man fell, and splattered. Light realized that he was running.

He ran faster, and the sickness spread even faster. Spiders with arms and teeth and briefcases boarded buses that were driven by caterpillars with beaks and toes. The sun was actually a face that was on fire, thrashing and grimacing. A dandelion was blown to pieces in the wind, and every seed carried with it an enormous virus, glycoproteins stretching out like fingers that gripped wrought iron benches and bare shoulders and sidewalk cracks to propel the seed farther along. Light was sprinting, flying, and the world was pressing in on him: eyes sprouting on violins with horns curling out of them, umbrellas lifting headless beasts that were swept off course by sudden eruptions of thorny vines, steamed windows through which could be seen the shadows of children drinking through proboscides. Light could hear the wind in his ears, rushing, and then heaving, and then—*laughing*. But it wasn't the wind laughing because it was *Light* laughing, and with every burst his feet lifted higher off the ground until he burst through the atmosphere and—

Woke.

The room was so cool and still and silent that it failed to feel real. With violently trembling hands, he turned on his lamp. The light launched an acid-tipped arrow between his eyes, splitting his skull. He clutched at his head to hold it together to no avail. "Holy fucking shit."

"Language, Yagami-kun."

L was awake. Of course he was awake. Light groaned through the pain and the frustration.

Silence, and then a halting "Do you need...a glass of water?"

"I need a *minute*." Forgetting about the chain, Light tried to get out of bed, was jerked back, and fell unelegantly to the ground.

"Oof," L grunted, pulled halfway across the bed.

Light could see his heart thudding through his shirt. He rubbed at his chest with his free hand. His pajamas were soaked through with sweat, and he

was freezing.

L could be heard whispering his way through the sheets and thudding softly down to the carpet. He landed next to Light in a crouch, hugging his knees to his chest. Solemnly, he reached out and pressed one cool hand to Light's forehead. Light decided to permit this for ten counts, and, fortunately for the both of them, L pulled away after only seven. "You need a warm glass of milk," he diagnosed. "Watari always gives me that." He stood smoothly, grabbed both of Light's hands, and heaved him to his feet. L's handcuffed hand continued to hold onto Light's handcuffed hand, the chain trailing loosely between them, until they had made it to the hallway and L was apparently satisfied that Light was going to follow without protesting or swearing or falling over.

Light was fortunately distracted from the memory of his nightmare by the nagging question of whether Watari continued to bring L warm glasses of milk on a regular basis.

In the kitchen, with a finely painted mug spinning slowly in the whirring microwave, Light was leaning against the island and rubbing at his temples. L was perched on the opposite counter, staring at him, not being secretive about it this time. "Bad dream?"

Light snorted. "Something like that."

A long pause, and then: "Did you see how you killed them?"

Immediately, like a hidden reflex: "Fuck you."

L gave a little peeved frown. "*Language*, Light-kun. This isn't like you." He turned and opened the microwave just as it beeped, cutting it off mid-alarm. "Your warm glass of milk is ready," L said, presenting it to Light like a gift.

"Thanks." Light took a little sip. It was fine, he supposed. L continued to stare at him expectantly, so he repeated, "Really, thanks."

As apologetically as he was capable of, L said, "Twenty-three percent."

Light set the mug down on the very edge of the island, where it teetered for a split second before crashing to the ground. The mug shattered, and the milk was a steaming deluge. Light lifted a mild eyebrow and said, "Oops."

Light had been reading the same sentence for the past ten minutes. It wasn't that he was daydreaming. He was actively reading the same sentence for ten minutes straight without being able to understand how the words fit together. It was even a sentence in Japanese, so there was no language barrier. It was a slightly more philosophical article, proposing to academia a postmodern response to the question of the morality of Kira's means and ends, but nothing too difficult. And yet—

"As noted before," the author continued, in the same voice as the rest of the article, "for many postmodern writers several of these lines of challenge are pursued simultaneously—indeed, they can be mutually supporting."

It went in through Light's eyes and apparently seeped out the back of his skull and dissipated into the air.

Light focused, planting his elbows on the desk, sinking his head into his hands, and staring hard. He paid close attention to each character, making sure he was reading them all correctly. "A-s-n-o-t-e-d-b-e-f-o-r-e-f-o-r-m-a-n-y-p-o-s-t-m-o-d-e-r-n-w-r-i..." Nothing was wrong. The spelling was impeccable. The grammar was flawless. But the words made no sense strung together.

He reread the previous paragraph. It was clear enough. He fully understood that it was an attack on the perspective that rationality as a concept was untenable. But this sentence... Why was his mind failing him? The letters swam, and Light's fingers sunk deeper into his hair.

"Ryuzaki," Light groaned, closing his eyes, hoping half-heartedly that the darkness would soothe the pain radiating behind his brows. "I need more coffee."

The chain clinked amenably. "Of course, Yagami-kun."

Perhaps the ease with which L agreed should have put Light on edge, but he was just happy to get his caffeine. Most likely L would take advantage of the trip to rifle through the cupboards for a refill on snacks. Sure enough, they left the kitchen with Light holding a fresh cup of black coffee and L clutching several sleeves of cookies to his chest.

L dumped them on the desk and, before Light could sit back down, requested, "I would like to make a trip to the washroom."

Light shrugged, holding the cup close to his nose, breathing in the rich roast of the coffee. "Let's go."

All business was as usual, with Light waiting outside the stall, sipping his coffee and humming to himself to distract himself from the fact that L was pissing a few feet away from him.

While still in the stall, L called, "Yagami-kun?"

Light's humming cut off and was replaced by a long sigh. "Yes?"

"I cannot help but notice that your recent loss of appetite has impacted the frequency of your bowel movements."

Light almost lost hold of his coffee. "Ryuzaki," he managed through gritted teeth, "*I refuse* to have this conversation with you, now or ever."

"I am concerned about your health." The toilet flushed and L emerged, actually looking a bit worried indeed. "I would not want you to fall ill."

Light snorted. "Of course, because that would hinder our progress in the case." Not that they were making much progress as it was. "Let me guess. My likelihood of being Kira would shoot up to twenty-nine percent if I were to catch a cold?"

"No." Light could see L frowning in the mirror. "I simply would not want you to fall ill."

Light wasn't sure how the conversation had started, but he was sure that he wasn't interested in it coming to an end anytime soon.

"Hamlet clearly had some kind of psychological or neurological condition that prevented him from rationally approaching the situation that he discovered upon his return home. How else can you reconcile his tremendous intellect with the clumsiness with which he goes about attempting to murder his uncle?"

"First off, you can't go about trying to diagnose literary figures created before the advent of modern medicine, especially if your diagnosis is only one that has appeared in the past century. Second—"

"Do not treat this claim like it is some Oedipus complex nonsense. The diagnosis is not required to be based on Freudian psychology or even to be complex. For instance, a simple case of depression exacerbated by extremely troubling family circumstances can be supported through an appeal to Hamlet's incredibly over-quoted soliloquy." L continued meeting Light's gaze evenly as he quoted, in English, "'To die; to sleep; no more; and by a sleep to say we end the heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation devoutly to be wish'd.' Listen to the precision of the language. 'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wish'd,' Shakespeare tells us. He has thought about this before, and it is seeping into his characterization."

Daringly, oh so daringly, dipping-into-ad-hominem daringly, Light commented, "It sounds like *you* have thought about this before."

L's hunched shoulders lifted, like a defense, like one half of a shrug, and he said, "Does that surprise you?"

Light's gaze touched on the darkness under L's eyes, on the hollow of his collarbone, on the torn skin at the base of his thumbnail, on his twisting bare toes, and he shook his head once. "No, I suppose it doesn't."

"Have you?" L asked.

It was a reflex. "Of course not."

L smiled, sadly. "'For who would bear the law's delay, the insolence of office and the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes, when he himself might his quietus make with a bare bodkin?'"

Light was uncomfortable. He remembered his headache and rubbed briefly at the bridge of his nose. "You're the one who has the whole soliloquy memorized."

L shrugged, a full shrug, exaggerated and obliging. "You're the one who understands exactly what I'm quoting."

"I'm not suicidal," Light snapped.

"I'm sitting here with you, so what does that make me?" Like a secret, L flashed two fingers and then four.

Twenty-four percent.

It was one thing for L to be continually suspicious that Light was Kira and quietly suffering from depression, but it was quite another upon L's revelation that these two unfortunate facts were working in tandem.

Light had been putting on a good face for the task force, considering seriously L's suggestions and being supportive of his confessed lack of motivation, but this was the final straw.

"I'm just not feeling it," L drawled, the slow clumsiness of his speech echoing the childishness with which he pulled at his lower lip. "Why even bother?"

Impossible. Surely L wasn't suggesting what Light thought he was suggesting, that the hundred days that Light had been part of the investigation had been for nothing, that the fifty-three days of his solitary confinement had been for nothing, that the past ten days of the complete

opposite of solitary confinement had been for nothing. Absolutely *impossible*.

"Trying hard to go after him," L continued droopily, "just puts us in danger,"

Of course. L had suggested the other day that he didn't want Light getting sick, but he had denied that it had anything to do with Light's probability of being Kira. L seemed to be suggesting the same thing now, but he was dragging his own wellbeing into the equation. If Light chose to continue the investigation and something happened to L, he could be accused of sabotage and incriminated as Kira. But if Light chose to discontinue the investigation, he could be accused of a more obvious kind of sabotage and again incriminated as Kira. It was a trap.

"Don't you agree?" L glanced at Light, ever so slightly, and his eyes were sharp and focused.

Bastard.

L reached for a cup of tea, his movements slow and exaggerated. This was not only a trap, but a show. "I've thought I was going to die so many times already," L sighed, really playing it up. Light could just imagine Matsuda making irritating little sympathetic noises. Alright. If L wanted a show, Light would give him a show.

"Ryuzaki," he said, quite calmly, standing up.

L turned to look at him, with a mild sort of curiosity, as if at a wild animal through a very dependable pane of glass, and that was all Light needed to work up the anger to actually pull back his fist and slam it into L's face.

The impact was tremendous, and it filled Light with a sick sort of pleasure. Misa was screaming and the coffee table with its plates of sweets had been overturned and L's legs were flying through the air, knocking over a plant and a picture frame before slamming into the opposite wall.

Pulling himself up off the ground, L looked genuinely stunned. "Ouch," he said, dully.

"Don't be ridiculous," Light snapped, loud and clear, so the microphones would have no trouble picking it up. "Just because I'm not the true Kira, just because you were wrong, you want to give up? You're going to sulk like a child?" If the investigation were to be compromised, there would be no mistake about who was to blame.

L rubbed at his injured face, recalculating. "I may have worded it poorly." He was backtracking, cutting away from the childish language. "But I am saying that continuing this is not going to get us anywhere, so perhaps we should stop."

Light let his anger show itself on his face as frustrated disbelief. "What are you *talking* about? Unless we chase him, there's no way we'll catch Kira! Who's the one who swore to send Kira to his execution?" He allowed himself a pause, as if finally realizing what L was suggesting, and then grabbed L by the front of his shirt. L didn't put up a hint of resistance. "The police, the FBI agents, TV announcers—how many innocent people do you think have been victimized? You're the one who put Misa and me in confinement!"

The hem of L's shirt covered his mouth and the dark fringe of his bangs covered his eyes, so Light did not see the signs that L would finish "I understand that, but whatever the reason..." with a swift kick in the face.

"One for one!"

Fuck.

"It is not that my reasoning was wrong," L was now saying, but his voice was a bit muffled by the ringing in Light's ears. "It is the fact that the case cannot be solved simply with Yagami Light as Kira and Amane Misa as the second Kira." Light couldn't figure out where his limbs were in space, let alone come up with a response in time. L was already moving on. "So I am a little disappointed. I am only human. Is that not allowed?"

"No," Light answered, nonsensically, he soon realized. "It's not," he powered on, trying desperately to make a coherent argument out of it. "The way you talk, it's like you won't be satisfied unless I'm Kira."

"Not satisfied unless you're Kira...?" Something had shifted in L's voice, his curiosity dipping inwards, and Light knew that he had been thrown off his game. "Yes, that may be true...." His voice was wandering and soft, slow and distracted, not directed at their audience anymore. Light took the opportunity to get his feet back under him, to steady himself, to force his proprioception to cooperate with his other senses. "I have just realized something..." He was rising, eyes trained on Light, just as Light rose as well. Whatever he had realized was going to be inflammatory, and he was preparing himself for a violent response. "I wanted you to be Kira."

And it wasn't even for show. Bastard.

The blow landed flat against the front of L's face, and L braced himself valiantly against it. "One for one," he muttered. "I will have you know that I am quite strong."

Despite the implied warning, Light was slow in preparing himself for the kick. It caught him right underneath the chin, and he saw stars and crumpled to the ground.

Shit.

Something was wrong. Even L could tell, and he broke what little was left of the show at once. He tugged at the chain and asked softly, "Light-kun?"

"Goddammit," Light groaned and vomited onto the carpet.

It was the worst sick day Light had ever had. He was dizzy and nauseous, reduced to a shaking lump in fetal position under the covers, utterly unable to sleep. L was on the other side of the bed with his laptop, typing occasionally, apparently doing a lot of reading. He did not mention Light's tossing and turning.

The rest of the task force was still hard at work outside the bedroom walls, and sometimes L's laptop would *bing* softly, indicating that some brave member of the taskforce was attempting to contact him. Once, it was a question for Light.

"Yagami-kun," L ventured, a long time after the *bing* had come.

Light hummed.

"Where did you save your database of international organizations that could benefit financially from Kira's killing patterns?"

Light's head swam for a long time, and L waited in absolute silence until Light mustered up the concentration to direct the inquirer along the right path.

L sent off the email, and then he said, "Yagami-kun?"

It was a question this time. Light could decide whether or not he wanted to respond. After a moment, he hummed.

"Would you consider the consumption of a sedative to help provide your body with the ability to recuperate properly?"

Light grinned into the pillows, a real, sloppy smile. "Are you asking me if I want drugs?"

"*Medication*, Light-kun."

"What would Watari say now?"

"I was not—" The ensuing silence was filled with L's surprise. "You were teasing."

"No need to show off your deductive reasoning, world's greatest detective."

"You did it again."

Light poked his face out of the pillows to find out whether L looked as unnecessarily bewildered as he sounded. He did. Light lifted an inquiring brow.

"Since we began working together like this, not once have you been teasing with anyone, let alone me. I admit I have held concerns about your mental health after the confinement."

Light was alarmed to realize that L was right.

"Regardless, my question remains. Will you accept a mild, clinically tested, legal sedative?"

Light just shook his head.

"Why?"

"You know why."

L stared thoughtfully for an impressively few number of seconds.

"Nightmares are worse than nausea."

Light pillow'd his head on one of his arms, quietly pleased. "Bingo."

"Some sleeping aids decrease dream recall."

Light wrinkled his nose, and L almost smiled. "Forgetting is even worse."

L did smile now, a sad smile that reached his eyes. "I know."

This was not the first time Light noticed L's dark circles, but it was the first time he *noticed* them.

L was changing the subject, and he was no longer looking at Light.

"Although it was justified, I cannot help but observe that it was my kick to your lower jaw that immediately preceded your onset of nausea." L glanced over briefly. His mouth was hard. "I am not apologizing. But I do feel... badly."

Light stared, quietly amazed.

"Watari said you were not concussed." L's teeth were worrying at the pad of his thumb. "But..."

"You said yourself that I've been off lately. I'm sure it's just a bug."

L scowled, biting down hard. He looked with distaste at his thumb then wiped it on his sleeve. There was a faint smear of blood against the white fabric. "Don't think these handcuffs would come off if you were to require a trip to the hospital. I'll follow you into the operating room if I have to."

It sounded more like a promise than a threat.

"If it is a bug, you really should get some sleep."

Light grabbed his pillow with both arms and hid his face in it, unexpectedly upset.

"I'm sorry." A pause. "I am not apologizing. I am expressing my condolences."

"Do you ever apologize?" Light wanted to ask. But, instead, he muttered, barely audible, "I can't."

"Please."

Stunning what sickness can draw out of people.

A sigh. Light heard L shifting closer. "Light-kun, if I promise to wake you as soon as I see signs that you are having a nightmare, will you sleep?"

"Will you be able to tell?" Hidden in this question was another one: "*Have you been able to tell?*"

A pause. This told Light that L was answering both questions when he said, "Yes."

Light shifted his face out of the pillow and kept his eyes closed. "You'll wake me in the middle of REM?"

"It's better than nothing."

Now that he was giving up, the drowsiness was kicking in. "Is that what you do? Wake up before you get to REM?"

L did not reply for a long while. Light could already feel his breathing slowing and fists unclenching when L finally said, with distinct remorse, "Twenty-six percent, Light-kun."

When L woke him up, Light was standing in the middle of a clean city street, deserted but for a parade of young girls, all identical, all with hair just like Sayu's, all walking calmly in single file until they disappeared into a pothole. There was total silence, but for the laughter. And just like every other time, it was Light's laughter.

"*Light*," L was demanding, just above a whisper, shaking insistently at Light's shoulder. "Wake up, Light. Light, Light, Light, Light—"

He was lucid enough to register the sound, but delirious enough to register it as laughter.

L was silenced quite effectively by Light skidding wildly off the bed and yanking L along with him. "Fuck," Light contributed, blinded by confusion and horror and literal darkness. L had landed partially on top of him and was saying something that his ears would or could not process. Light pushed him off and started sliding away. "Oh, god. Dear god. *Fuck*."

"Light, please." L was reaching towards him, intending to comfort, perceived as attacking. Light threw all of his limbs at L, uncoordinated but effective, and L hit the bedside table. Before Light could do anything absurd like try to flee, there was a *click* and the lamp turned on and the room was familiar once again.

"Shit."

L was crouching by the bedside table, pulling his hand away from the lamp, and there was a steady stream of blood coursing from his brow. L's hand paused, and then moved to touch his head. It came away dripping red down his arm.

"I'm so sorry." The dream was gone. There was blood on the carpet and L was very silent. Light pulled his pajama shirt over his head, worked it through the handcuff, and balled it up for L to press to his head. "We have to find Watari."

"I'm sure he's on his way." L's voice was slow and stunned. He nibbled at his bottom lip as he spoke, slurring his words slightly. "I'm sure he's already seen. If we leave, we'll miss him."

"Unless he's usually awake at two in the morning, I highly doubt he's seen anything."

"Oh." L was staring with mild concern at the blood on his left hand. "Then I should call him." L fished his phone out of his pocket before Light could stop him, and by that point there was blood everywhere and little point in trying to prevent its spread any further. L dialed, held the phone to the ear not covered by Light's shirt, and after a few rings, said, "Watari, I have a superficial head wound that is bleeding profusely, and I request your medical expertise." When L closed the phone, Light saw that his hand was shaking. He whispered, "Watari is coming."

"You should sit down."

"I am fine standing."

"Come on. We both know you should sit down."

"Thank you, but—"

"Please, L—"

"Ryuzaki, Yagami-kun." L's voice was unexpectedly sharp. He compressed his mouth and turned away.

Light crossed his arms over his chest and wished he had given L something else for his head.

Watari was there in under a minute, carting with him a large first aid kit, wearing a startling blue plaid pajama set. He did a brief double take at Light being bare-chested, but recovered quickly enough. Taking in the blood spattered across the carpet and down L's front, he demanded, "L, what happened?"

L did not reprimand him like he had reprimanded Light. "Yagami-kun and I fell off the bed, and I hit my head on the bedside table." It was just vague enough to be true.

Watari's eyes went very wide and he cleared his throat. "Well. While you're keeping the pressure on that head wound, let me check your eyes."

"Of course."

Watari held out his finger to check L's focusing and tracking. "Right at my fingertip," he reminded.

"I am."

Watari moved his finger more slowly, and then frowned. "Is it double?"

L was silent.

"*L*." Watari spoke with a parental firmness that made even Light want to tell him about his vision.

"Slightly," L admitted in a murmur. "Just when it's moving."

Watari sighed and nudged up his glasses. "We'll check again in a few minutes, right after I get a clean compress on this. Yagami-kun, thank you for giving up your shirt. I'll do my best to have the stain removed for you."

"Oh. Thank you." Light doubted he was ever going to be clear on Watari's exact job description.

L failed the second vision test and lied unconvincingly about failing the third one, which meant that within the next ten minutes all three of them were in a limo headed to the hospital.

2. Chapter 2

Thank you for all your absolutely lovely reviews. :) Updates will be every Saturday, because some of you were wondering about that.

Much thanks to my beta, the absolutely wonderful chibi-hime123.

I don't own Death Note.

For the first time, Light was wondering whether Watari was working for L or L was working for Watari, because for the first time, L was showing indications of obedience to an entity other than his own brilliance and pigheadedness. First, L had agreed to go to a public—albeit very secure and faraway—hospital to get his head checked, and then he had given in to Watari's insistence that the handcuffs be removed during the CT scan, and now:

"Sir, if you could just—"

"No."

Watari interrupted the intercom conversation immediately. "Ryuzaki"—the code names were back to being firmly in place—"lie flat on your back right this instant."

There was a long pause. The CT scan technician opened his mouth, and Watari stretched out a hand over his chest, as if he might physically catapult himself through the glass if not stopped. The technician closed his mouth, and L slowly slid his feet down the table. His hands were pressed tightly to his sides, and Light could just see that they were shaking.

"Thank you," Watari said.

"It'll be done before you know it, Ryuzaki," Light chimed in, wanting to be encouraging because L seemed genuinely and unexpectedly distressed.

But not distressed enough, apparently, not to be his usual, vengeful self. "And then it'll be your turn, Asahi-kun," L snapped, to everyone's surprise.

"Me?" Light asked.

"Him?" the technician echoed.

"If I have to be subjected to enough radiation to increase my cancer risk by two point oh one one three percent, then so do you. It's only fair."

"You're making that up on the spot," accused Light, who had heard enough percentages to last him a lifetime.

"He's right actually, though I'm not so sure about the point such and such," the technician said, alienating both Light and L in one fell swoop.

"Two point oh one one three," L grumbled with certainty.

"We don't typically do unnecessary medical procedures," the technician continued, "even for the sake of, ah, fairness."

"Asahi-kun had a concussion earlier today," L said, his tone indicating that he was well aware of his newfound status as a tattletale. "He was hit under the chin by a blunt object—"

"You mean, your *foot*."

"—and he fell to the ground and vomited. Those are grounds for further medical examination."

"Ryuzaki," Watari jumped back in, "you are only delaying the inevitable. I examined Asahi-kun myself, and there was no sign that he was concussed. You, on the other hand, not only bled profusely, but had double vision, and your injury was not even to the back of your head. Be quiet and drop this right this instant."

There was a terrible pause, and then the technician volunteered, "Vomiting after a head injury actually is serious. My professional opinion would be to,

ah, get the CT scan."

Watari sighed. Light was watching L's face for that telltale smirk, but he had closed his eyes and he looked more sober than victorious. Maybe he really was nervous about the danger of the radiation. "Looks like we'll be even after all, Ryuzaki."

"Then let's get this over with," L muttered. "Go ahead. I'm ready."

The CT scan was quick and painless. Right when L got out of the machine, Light was sent in and he was scanned as well. No contrast was needed. No one was expecting for there to be anything for the contrast to find. The handcuffs were reattached and they were sent back to wait for the doctor.

"There is a vending machine straight ahead and to the right," L announced in the hallway. "If you could just get me a—"

"No food or beverages until you're cleared," Watari said, more harshly than was strictly necessary. Light had been considering asking for a cup of black coffee, given that it was the middle of the night, but he now discontinued that train of thought entirely.

"They won't find anything," L pouted. "My vision is perfectly fine."

"It wasn't anywhere near perfectly fine less than an hour ago."

"Everything has cleared up now. But if my blood glucose levels drop any—" "

"Fortunately, you don't need your deductive reasoning at the moment. Think of this as a much needed break from the case."

"This is the last way I would choose to spend a voluntary break."

"Perhaps you should have thought about that before you involved yourself in the circumstances that led to such an injury."

They had been smoothly bantering more than arguing, as if off of a time-tested script, but now L faltered. "I don't understand," he said, and it was an incredible admission coming from L, but the casual way he said it and the setting of the moment seemed to diffuse it until Light wasn't sure that it had come out of L's mouth in the first place.

"Then I won't press the point," Watari continued stiffly. "In addition, I will not review the tapes of your room for tonight unless you ask that I do."

L fell completely silent now, so confused that it was now worth serious contemplation. Light, who wasn't too keen on Watari or anyone else knowing about his nightmares, stayed silent and hoped that Watari would follow up on his promise to keep out of the security tapes this one time.

Watari's doctor friend, who had arranged for this visit to be kept under wraps, was waiting for them when they got back to the room, printed scans in hand.

"What service!" Watari chuckled when they walked in, showing himself capable of utter transformation within seconds. "I hope we're not causing you to abandon any more critically ill patients!"

The doctor friend only acknowledged this greeting by smiling tightly. He turned his attention to business at once. "Asahi-san, I hear that you took a CT scan as well to support Ryuzaki-san."

"That's right," Light said at the same time that L said, "And to check his concussion."

"Well, your scans show that you are in perfect health, Asahi-san. But I'm glad to know that Ryuzaki-san has support here today. Ryuzaki-san, I have some medical issues to discuss with you. Would you like to discuss these issues alone, or would you like to have your support in here with you?"

L's confusion from the hall deepened. There was something unnervingly pitiable about it all. "There is something wrong with my scans?"

"I'm very sorry, Ryuzaki-san, but, yes, there is."

There was a long pause, and then L shook his head, compressing his mouth with sudden emotion, and sighed. "And you are certain that they are my scans and not Asahi-san's?"

"I—" The doctor broke off and looked between the two scans, one in each hand. "I am assuming that the scan that was taken first was Asahi-san's scan. Is this incorrect?"

L was compressing his mouth so tightly as to be unable to reply.

"That is incorrect," Watari said with a hint of relief. "Asahi-san did the scan second."

The doctor looked between the two scans more quickly. "Oh. Oh." L closed his eyes. "I'm terribly sorry, but Asahi-san, you are the one with the medical issues to discuss."

"Me?" Light asked.

"Him," Watari said with confidence.

"We can discuss the concussion in front of them," Light said, a bit numbly. "They'll be helping me recover anyways."

"I'm afraid it's a bit more serious than a concussion," the doctor said. "All of you, please take a seat."

As he sat, L drew his legs up to his chest and linked his hands about them. The chain rattled slightly as it trembled. "A hematoma then?" Light guessed absently, sitting on the bed, most of his attention on L's precariously held expression. "An aneurysm? Will I need surgery?"

"At this point, surgery would do more harm than help."

"Oh, that's good. I guess we caught it early enough, thanks to Ryuzaki-san."

"I'm sorry, Asahi-san, but the reason I do not advise surgery is that things have progressed for so long that there is no longer anything we can do."

"I don't understand," Light said, and he heard himself speak as if standing in the hall again.

"We would like to do more scans before providing an official diagnosis and decision on treatment, but at this point it appears that you have a glioblastoma multiforme in your temporal and frontal lobes. This means that there is a malignant tumor taking up a large portion of your brain."

The chain clinked louder and louder, and the sound of Light's own laughter grew louder and louder, but Light remained perfectly silent.

The doctor had tried to continue their conversation, but the laughter was so loud that he couldn't get a word in edgewise, so eventually he had just left. Then Watari had tried to do something with his words, but apparently these words had started a fight between him and L, and apparently this fight was strong enough to result in Watari leaving the room too.

The moment the door closed, L dropped to his feet and smoothly delivered a spinning kick to Light's side.

"Oof," Light grunted as he fell off the other side of the bed, the chain pulling taut over the mattress. He scrambled to his feet, felt the deep soreness in his ribs, balled his fists, and launched himself at L.

They scuffled low to the ground, Light throwing his fists and trying to pin L down, L slipping away and knocking Light's feet out from under him. Eventually, every time Light tried to pull himself into an even remotely upright position, L kicked the balance out of him, leaving him flat on the floor once again. Finally, there came a point when Light landed on his back and stayed there, staring at the ceiling and listening to the sound of his heavy breathing.

The laughter had stopped.

"You were worried about a two point oh one one three percent increase in your chance of getting cancer, and here I am with a tumor the size of a small rodent in my skull."

"I wasn't worried about cancer."

"Then why did you memorize the amount a CT scan increases your chance of getting cancer?"

L was silent, and Light groaned and closed his eyes. Dark bursts of color shifted across his eyelids.

"You were looking it up for me."

The chain clinked.

"You knew something was wrong with me." A moment passed, and then he sighed. "There wasn't anything wrong with your vision. You just wanted to get me in a hospital."

"I'm sorry, Light."

Light laughed, just once, more a sharp, dry breath than anything else. "Not apologizing though," he said before L could say it himself. "Just expressing your condolences."

Carefully, L said, "No. I am apologizing."

Light's eyes flashed open.

"I have been monitoring you on some level for the past eight months. That tumor has been developing for years. It should not have taken me this long to determine that something was wrong."

"Don't you dare say that you should have known something was wrong, because I didn't suspect a single thing, so if you say that, then you'll be implying that you're a hell of a lot smarter than I am."

There was a smile in L's voice when he said, "Well..."

Light ignored this, changing the subject. "Treatment is bound to be expensive. I wouldn't usually ask this, but you have a lot more money than I do, and I don't want to drag my family down with me. Do you have enough to support the investigation as well as to help me finance whatever they want to radiate me with?"

L was silent for so long that Light wondered whether he had miscalculated in asking, but then L said, "Light-kun, I do not think we should continue the investigation."

Light groaned and pulled himself into a seated position so he could figure out from L's expression what kind of trick he was pulling now. "Look me in the eyes and say that again."

Slowly, with his eyes dark and deep and steady, L repeated, "Light-kun, I do not think we should continue the investigation."

"Is this because of the tumor? Because you know as well as I do that my intelligence hasn't been impacted by the tumor, not yet at least. And you also know that I'll work just as hard, regardless of what kind of treatment they have in store for me."

"That isn't it. I have no doubt that you would be an invaluable part of the team."

"Then is it because I might be dying? Because catching Kira is definitely on my bucket list."

"That isn't it. I have no doubt that your sense of justice is perfectly intact."

"Then what? Do you want to continue the investigation without me? Do you think that I'm Kira and I'm sabotaging things?"

"I know that you, Yagami Light, were Kira. But if you do not know the same, considering the circumstances, perhaps it is better for this to remain a

mystery to the rest of the world."

Light frowned, and L tensed, as if expecting him to start another fight.

"You're not seriously suggesting that my brain cancer increases the likelihood that I'm Kira."

L held his gaze and did not answer.

"What's the percentage now?" Light demanded. "I know you've recalculated. Tell me what it is. You've never had any qualms about telling me before."

L shrugged, too fluidly. "I need more information about the exact location of your tumor to be sure."

"Then give me your best estimation."

L hesitated for a long while, and then admitted, "Low sixties."

"Low *sixties*?!"

"No higher than low seventies. No higher than seventy-five, certainly."

"One CT scan and your percentage *triples*?"

"My theory assumed that you had experienced memory loss, but it could not explain how the memory loss had occurred. Now there is a quite likely explanation."

Light shook his head, furious. "L, this isn't a game. If you told anyone that you were seventy-five percent sure I was Kira, it would be as good as a death sentence!"

"I know very well that this is not a game, and I think there are more pressing concerns right now when it comes to death sentences."

Light flinched. "I'm not going to die *that* quickly from this tumor. He said they couldn't do surgery, but he didn't say anything about radiation or

chemotherapy."

"I don't think you understand the risks of this kind of treatment, Light."

"Do you really think I would rather die than lose my hair?"

"It isn't the physical risks that I'm concerned about, but the neurological."

"If I don't have any treatment, I'm going to have a shitload of neurological risks."

That shut L up.

"We're going to continue the investigation," Light said, "and we're going to continue it whether we do it in your giant tower or in the hospital or in a hole in the ground, and we're going to continue it until we find Kira or drop dead."

L sighed and closed his eyes. "And you want to do this even if the investigation ends in determining that you are Kira?"

"I told you, forgetting is even worse. If I've forgotten about being a mass murderer, I want to remember."

"If you can't ever remember? If those memories are gone for good?"

"Then I suppose it's a good thing I won't have much time left to dwell on it."

More scans showed that the doctor's initial impressions had been correct. It was a grade four astrocytoma, also called a glioblastoma multiforme. They abbreviated this as GBM, because it sounded less frightening than the full name.

The doctor had changed his opinion on surgery when he returned, most likely because Watari had told him to, if the way he kept glancing nervously over at Watari while talking to Light was any indication. Surgery was an

important first step, he now said. They would do radiation or chemotherapy or both after the surgery. Light just wanted him to leave so that he and L could research this on their own. He didn't trust anyone who could be so easily convinced to do a one-eighty. They returned to the taskforce building by the time the streetlights were already starting to go out. Watari informed the taskforce that Light's sick day had been extended at least another twenty-four hours, and L and Light spent the rest of the day researching in the bedroom.

"Historical median survival time," Light read bitterly, "eleven point two months. Historical one-year survival: forty-six percent. Historical three-year survival: seven percent. Historical five-year survival: four percent." He closed his eyes, the numbers washing over him. "There's a higher chance that I'm Kira than that I'll live longer than a year."

"Age of under fifty is linked to longer survival in glioblastoma multiforme," L read, as fit his unofficial job of finding the encouraging statistics, "as is ninety-eight percent resection—"

"We already know that surgery is a bad idea if I don't want to end up a vegetable."

"—use of temozolomide chemotherapy—"

"Temozolomide works best as a follow-up to radiation, which we don't have time for."

"—and better Karnofsky performance scores."

"My score can't be that good if you noticed something was wrong."

"Your score would have been one hundred had I not noticed something was wrong because there would have been nothing to notice in the first place."

"Well, it definitely won't be one hundred when I start having seizures."

"We don't know that that will happen."

"It definitely will if I start temozolomide."

"Stop," L snapped. He shut both of their laptop screens and glared. "This is going nowhere. Will you or will you not try surgery?"

"I will not," Light said, folding his arms across his chest. "If I only have eleven months and six days left to live, I'm not going to waste three of those months on recovering from a surgery that might leave me unable to work on the Kira case at all. Remember the story we read in the forums about the journalist? Or the teacher?"

"It could take you as little as one month to recover, and it could double your life expectancy, especially if temozolomide is—"

"So we're back to the temozolomide again!"

"Stop!" L shouted, grabbing at Light's elbow, grip unexpectedly hard. "Don't you want to at least try to live longer than a year? Because you won't if you decide not to get the surgery. Do you understand how incredibly much longer three years is than one year?"

"It won't take us three years to solve the Kira case. One year is all I need."

"What are you saying? That solving the Kira case is the only thing you have left to do with your life?"

"Yes, that's what I'm saying."

L drew his hand away and compressed his mouth.

"I don't have enough time to graduate university, and I definitely don't have enough time to even think about joining the NPA. What else is there?"

"You must have goals other than those related to your occupation."

"Do you?"

"That's an unfair comparison."

"Why?"

L hesitated and then admitted, "Watari is the closest thing I have to a father. This is my life. I have known nothing else. But, Light-kun, you have friends and family and admirers. What about something as simple as falling in love?"

It sounded ridiculous coming out of L's mouth. Light was half-convinced it was some kind of sick joke, especially after L had divulged a tantalizing hint of information about his secret childhood. "You mean, Misa?" he asked dryly, in case it really was a joke.

But apparently it was not, because L said quite seriously, "I mean, anyone."

Light laughed and shook his head, breaking eye contact. "Everyone is like Misa to me."

"You've never fallen in love?"

Tight-lipped, Light shook his head again.

"Impossible. I know you've had girlfriends at least. You've gone out on dates."

"That's different."

"How?"

"Those girls all asked me out. I haven't asked a girl out since—well, there was Takada, and I asked Yuri to go to Spaceland with me last December, but I didn't really like them."

L flinched. "Spaceland?"

"Yeah."

"There was a hijacking on a Spaceland bus in December."

"There was? Hm. Oh. Oh." Light frowned deeply, leaning back in the pillows. "I don't—I can't believe I forgot about this. I—I was *on* the Spaceland bus during the hijacking."

They stared at each other in stunned silence, and then L closed his eyes and sighed. "Light, I don't think—"

"How could I have just *forgotten* being on a bus during a hijacking?!" Light interrupted, reeling. "It must have been terrifying! But I don't remember that at all. I remember being very calm. Maybe I was in shock? How did I just forget? Why wouldn't I have mentioned anything to you?"

L was gracious enough not to say anything.

"Could I have forgotten more than just being Kira?" Light demanded. "Do you think I forgot everything traumatic that happened to me? No. I remember the confinement, so..."

L flinched at the reminder that the confinement had been comparable to being Kira.

"I remember my father pretending to shoot me," Light listed. "I remember breaking my leg when I was eight. I remember being in a car accident when I was thirteen. I remember falling asleep during a final exam when I was fourteen."

L's mouth twitched upwards and he opened his eyes. "I am fairly certain that does not count as a trauma."

"It does," Light said quite seriously. "I took the test on Friday, and I was so upset that I couldn't sleep all weekend. When I went to talk to my teacher on Monday morning, I had been awake for almost sixty hours."

"What did your teacher say?"

"She let me retake the exam. My grade in the class was one hundred and two point seven percent."

L shook his head. "I know trauma, and that is *not* a trauma," he said, unexpectedly fiercely.

Light lifted a brow. "Oh, do you now?" he challenged. "If you're so knowledgeable, by all means, correct me."

L glared. "By all means. A trauma is when you single-handedly incriminate a young man of having committed eleven counts of first-degree murder, causing him to commit suicide rather than be put on death row, only to discover four months later that he was innocent. A trauma is when you discover that your mother has been murdered and that you are considered by the government to be legally dead. A trauma is when a dear acquaintance impersonates you, becomes a serial killer, attempts self-immolation, and two years later is killed by Kira. That is trauma. You are a child, Light-kun, and you have not known enough trauma to wonder whether you can or cannot remember it."

Light stiffened. "Well," he said, angry and embarrassed and most of all horrified, "here's to hoping that this next year will contain enough trauma for me to die as an adult rather than a child."

L now looked genuinely furious. "Am I to understand then that you will refuse surgery?"

"Yes. And right now I am refusing both chemotherapy and radiation."

"*Yagami Light—*"

"I will take medication for nausea and swelling so long as there are no side effects, and I will take medication for seizures if that becomes an issue, but I will not live out the final days of my life in a hospital or tied to one."

"I won't let you just give up—"

"Don't you see that's what I'm doing?!" Light shouted. "I'm not going to let them fuck up what's left of my brain! And I'm not going to get so close to

solving this fucking case and then have it torn out of my hands! Don't you see that's the only thing that matters to me?"

"Your brain or the case?" L demanded.

"Well— Both!" Light sputtered. "They're the same thing! If I can't solve this case, the past eighteen years of tests and school and games will have been for nothing!"

"How dare you say that," L snapped. "Regardless of the outcome of this case, you will always be unspeakably brilliant."

It was high and thoroughly unexpected flattery. Suspicious, Light demanded, "Even if Kira outsmarts the both of us?"

"Especially."

The implications of that took a moment to sink in, and then Light frowned. "Not this again. Not now."

"Listen to me. Kira is brilliant, though wrong. You too are brilliant, and less frequently wrong."

"Hey!"

"But if you were to be not only yourself but Kira as well... Why, your brilliance would be something I have never seen before."

"Don't expect to flatter your way out of this one. Calling me the smartest person in the world doesn't make up for calling me a mass murderer."

Hesitant, but apparently unable to stop himself, L hedged, "I never called you the smartest person in the world."

"What? Oh." Light scowled. "So, *you're* the most brilliant, but I'm a close second."

"I would say we are at an impasse."

"Hm."

"Don't act so displeased, Light. Have you ever met anyone with whom you could genuinely argue about whose intelligence was superior?"

Light sighed. "So, you're saying you want me to be Kira so that we can be equals."

"Yes."

"And if we weren't equals, it would disappoint you enough that you would rather I be a horrifying criminal."

"Think of how many times everyone else has disappointed you, Light. Could you bear it if I did as well?"

The way L spoke, it was like they were the only two real people left in the world. And maybe it was because of the confinement and the handcuffs and now the cancer, but Light was starting to feel the same way too. "No," he admitted. "No, I couldn't."

L's eyes widened. He had apparently not been expecting such a definite response. "Hm."

"I'm not Kira," Light reminded, "but I suppose I wish for your sake that I was."

"And that, Light, is where we will always disagree. You are Kira, but I wish for your sake that you weren't."

3. Chapter 3

I can't tell you all how much I appreciate your reviews! Thank you so, so much. :)

I'm pretty sure the Greek should show up on all of your screens, but if there are a few weird gaps in the dialogue like 80% of the way through, that's probably why.

I don't own Death Note, Hamlet, or the New Testament.

They took their evening showers at four in the afternoon. They had informed Watari without uncertainty of Light's decision to forgo treatment and had asked him to schedule regular check-ups with a trusted oncologist, and it was now time for them to catch up on some much-needed rest. Even L was going to try to sleep tonight. Neither of them had mentioned their nightmares. It was one of those nights for simply riding them out.

Light was blow-drying his hair in front of the bathroom mirror, and L was crouching on the closed toilet seat. His arms were folded around his legs, his chin was resting on his knees, and his hair was very dark, very uncombed, very wet, and very dripping.

"Hey." Light turned the blow dryer on L, who flinched like an irritated cat. "If you're planning on actually sleeping tonight, can you also plan on drying your hair? I'm tired of waking up with my face in a bunch of wet sheets."

"Okay," L said absently. He picked up his towel from where he had dropped it on the floor, and, with astounding laziness, dabbed at his bangs a few times before dropping the towel on the floor again.

Light turned off the blow dryer to show how incredibly serious he was.

They stared at one another with only the whirring of the bathroom fan in the background, and then L said, "It's only water."

"It's *annoying*."

L just stared.

"Are you seriously going to be an asshole about this and not just pick up a towel and dry your hair? Because if you are"—Light wielded the blow dryer like a weapon and L's eyes went wide—"then I have no choice but to dry it myself."

L's eyes narrowed. "You're teasing again, aren't you?"

The blow dryer clicked on and Light pounced.

In usual circumstances, L would have been able to defend himself quite easily, but these were fairly unusual circumstances. As it was, L reared away from the approaching blow dryer with enough force to catapult him off the toilet seat. Light followed, standing over L and aiming the blow dryer at his hair, laughing until L managed to twist his legs around Light's legs, pulling him down and knocking the air out of his lungs.

"Oof," Light grunted, and then L was trying to wrestle the blow dryer from his hands, and, wonder of all wonders, he was actually smiling, apparently despite his best efforts. Light allowed himself three seconds to be distracted by this surprising turn of events on L's face, and then he gathered all his strength and concentration to launch the both of them into a barrel roll across the bathroom floor.

The maneuver ended with the two of them crashing into the wall and Light pinning L down, mostly out of some combination of aerodynamics and sheer luck. "Oof," L grunted, the sound a bit muffled because Light was lying on his diaphragm. Before L could reorient himself, Light shifted so that he was sitting on L's torso, freeing his hands to hold the blow dryer high and pointed vaguely towards L's hair. L laughed, squinting against the hot air in his face, and lunged upwards just enough to knock the blow dryer out of Light's hands, sending it skidding across the floor until it yanked hard at the cord and popped out of the socket, sputtering into silence.

"Whew," Light sighed, planting his hands on either side of L and catching his breath. "Well. I suppose we can call this yet another impasse."

L was absolutely beaming. "I would call this a victory on my part," he managed, diaphragm still pretty compressed, "seeing as my hair is still wet."

"Less wet though," Light pointed out. "Especially your bangs." He passed his fingers through L's bangs experimentally, finding them cool and damp but definitely not dripping anymore. Now L's bangs and all the rest of his hair had fallen away from his face, revealing it to be very clear and flushed and striking.

"Light-kun," L said wheezily, with his fingertips on Light's knees, "I can't breathe."

"Oh." Light stared down at L for another few moments, and then shifted his weight and rolled off. They lay quietly on the cool bathroom floor, staring at the buzzing fluorescents above, listening to each other's breathing and their own heartbeats.

"How old are you?" Light asked.

"Twenty-four."

"Oh. Hm."

"Does that surprise you?"

"I thought you were closer to my age. Six years is a bigger age gap than I was expecting."

"Does it matter?"

"I guess not. I was just thinking."

They lay there for a little while longer, and then L tugged at the chain.

"Hm?"

"I'm tired, Light-kun."

"Then let's go to bed." Light heaved himself upright, but L continued to lay there, now with his eyes closed.

"I hope," he said, "that you it will not impress poorly on me if I wake up in a less than professional state of mind."

"I think professional got thrown out the window when we started sharing a bed."

"I'm serious."

"Me too."

L eyed him skeptically.

"Come on." Light stood and held out his hands. "I have brain cancer and you have a lot of trauma and we both have nightmares. Whatever. Let's just try to get some sleep before we go back to work tomorrow." Light wiggled his fingers, and L grabbed onto his hands so he could be heaved up. "Let's go."

Light woke cursing, sweating, and fumbling for the lamp. It had been the same nightmare: the dark maw, the sick world, and worst of all the laughter. With trembling fingertips he traced his mouth to make sure it wasn't smiling. "I'm not Kira," he whispered. He felt the shape of the words against his fingers and could not tell whether they were untrue.

There was a catching of breath a few feet away. Light turned his attention to L's side of the bed, but found only a violently trembling lump under the sheets.

"L?" he whispered to the lump. "I mean, Ryuzaki?"

The lump's trembling settled down for a moment, but could not be contained and broke out with as much fervor as before, except that it was now accompanied by an unsettling sort of choking noise. So this was the unprofessional state of mind Light had been warned of. Quite frankly, he was so shocked that he found it difficult to have any sort of emotional reaction at all.

"Are you alright?" Light asked because he could think of nothing else to say.

"Go back to sleep!" the lump cried in some crude imitation of L's voice, and Light felt his stomach drop. "I'm alright!" The sheets pulled tighter over the curled body, but this seemed to increase the shaking rather than alleviate it.

Sitting up, Light started to stretch out a hand, and then flinched it back. "Maybe you just need some fresh air," he suggested, the shock doing funny things to his voice. "We can go upstairs to that level with the balcony. Or we can even go up to the roof or something. Oh, or a warm glass of milk! Want me to get you a warm glass of milk? You said Watari gives that to you when this happens."

"He hasn't done that in fourteen years," came the tremulous reply. "I'm fine, really." The more he talked, the more he seemed to calm down. "I just need to wait. It'll pass."

"Well, how long will you need to wait?"

"Yagami-kun, you can go back to sleep. Do not let me keep you awake."

Light frowned. "What's this Yagami-kun all of a sudden? I'm not going back to sleep until you do."

"This is all the sleep I will be getting tonight. I would advise you to do your very best to get some more rest."

Light twisted to see the alarm clock, and he saw one-one-four-two glowing back at him. "It's not even midnight yet! You have plenty of time to go back

to sleep! And, look, you're not even shaking that much anymore!"

"That is unusual, but, all the same, I know from years of experience that this will be all for me. But I will not use my laptop or any other light-producing devices, so you should have no trouble getting back to sleep."

Light sighed. "Okay, this is absolutely ridiculous." He scooted across the bed, closing those couple feet of cold sheets that had remained undisturbed this whole time, and sat right next to the lump that was L. "Get out of these sheets at least. You're going to suffocate."

"Light-kun!" L's voice leapt. "I hope this will not be a repeat of the blow dryer incident, because I am in no mood to play."

"Neither am I," Light said. "This isn't healthy. And it's not like I'm one to talk, but this is no way to deal with whatever nightmares you have."

"You know nothing about my nightmares," L snapped.

"Maybe, but I know a lot about nightmares generally. And if I listened to you about the warm milk thing—"

"You pushed the milk off the counter."

"—then you have to listen to me about this sheets thing. Now come on. I'm willing to wrestle you on this one."

"Fuck you."

The sound of L swearing was more alarming than the sound of him having an emotional breakdown. It confirmed to Light that L had been allowed to soak in his trauma alone for far too long. "Okay, that's it," he declared, and followed through on his threat.

But L wasn't budging on this one, and in no time he was kicking out and trying to toss Light off the other side of the bed. Unfortunately for himself, he was too effective and he ended up not only tossing Light off the side of

the bed, but causing himself to be dragged along. They hit the ground with a terrific *thump*, the sheets pulling along with them, but not enough to cover L very effectively anymore. Everything above his knee was now visible. He and Light met each other's gazes, and L burst into tears. He curled into his characteristic crouch, which suddenly looked much closer to the fetal position, and buried his face in his knees.

Light had overstepped. This was different than the other three times they had fought: first out of anger, then out of despair, and most recently out of playfulness. This hadn't been a fight, but an attack. Light was flooded with guilt.

"Okay, I'm sorry," he said, sitting up, close to L but not too close. "And that's an apology, just so we're clear. I guess getting out of the sheets wasn't a good idea. I shouldn't have pushed you. If you want, we can get back in bed, and I'll leave you alone, just like you asked."

But L was too busy with his tears to give any sort of coherent response. So Light just sat beside him, looking down and brushing his hands slowly across the carpet. Eventually, the tears stopped, but still L did not speak. Light folded his legs and set his hands on his knees and continued to wait. Then the sheets rustled and L tentatively set a hand over Light's.

"That," he whispered, meeting Light's eyes in the semi-darkness, "was highly unusual."

"Good to know," Light whispered back, frozen, but for his words and his heart picking up.

"I feel—I feel that I could possibly go back to sleep. It was—refreshing, I suppose."

"I'm glad to hear it."

"Light-kun?"

"Yeah?"

"Thank you."

"Oh." Light couldn't remember the last time L had genuinely thanked him. "You're welcome, I guess. I still feel bad though. I don't want it to become a regular thing for me to attack you against your will. I'm okay with sitting next to you though."

L smiled, a comfortable, natural smile, as if he thought that it was so dark that Light couldn't see him. "Do you mind if I do something else highly unusual?"

"Probably not, though that's pretty vague."

L moved his hand away from Light's, but only so that he could plant both of his hands on either side of Light's legs, and then he leaned in, so slowly that Light had ample time to process what was happening, so slowly that Light overthought it until he was left utterly stunned, and then pressed his mouth very carefully to Light's mouth. When he leaned away, just as slowly, Light followed him forward and slid a hand around the back of his neck to keep him close. L's hair was unexpectedly soft. They kissed for a few long moments, and then pulled away and stared at one another with wide eyes.

"I've never done that before," L whispered.

"Me neither," Light whispered back, all sorts of questions about his sexuality bubbling to the surface.

L sighed, and the motion made him sink closer towards Light. "I don't mean this specifically with you. I mean anything at all with anyone."

Light's heart thundered and his stomach flipped at the closeness at it all. He slipped his other hand onto the back of L's neck, wondering and eager. "Okay," he said, because it was surprising but not terribly so.

"Okay?" L echoed.

"Mhm." Light leaned in, but L sank back, pulling away. "What's wrong?"

"I don't want you to feel obligated to me. This isn't a test, and a positive response will not decrease your chance of being Kira, neither will a negative response increase your chance of being Kira."

Light frowned. "I know that. L, I'm doing this because I want to."

L had closed his eyes, and Light realized that it was because he had used the wrong name—or, rather, the right one.

"You're not obligated to me either, you know," Light reminded. He started sliding his hands away from L's neck, in case he felt trapped. "If you want, we can—"

But L caught Light's wrists before he could move too far away. "No. It's just that I find it difficult to fully believe that you could truly want—this—with me." He reddened, astonishingly. "No one else ever has, you understand."

Light did understand, but that didn't mean he agreed. He tugged his wrists free so that he could hold L's face in his hands. He kissed L's forehead, nose, and mouth, just once each. "I've never wanted anyone the way I want you, so I suppose this is new for the both of us."

This time Light was the one to start the kiss, and this time it continued for much longer. Things only came to a sudden halt when the bedroom was filled with a piercing, too-familiar alarm.

"Oh my god," Light groaned, rolling off of L, who tugged at the chain in a feeble attempt to call Light back. "I have to turn this off, which means that you're going to have to get up." With L sighing and the alarm continuing, they clambered back onto the king-sized bed, and Light stretched out a hand to smack the top of the alarm clock, and then he yanked at the cord, unplugging it easily, and threw the alarm clock onto the floor. "Phew," he sighed, falling back into the pillows. "It's exactly midnight, which means that I must have forgotten to set the time on the alarm before turning it on. Whoever decided to set alarm clocks to midnight automatically obviously didn't think it through very well." His rant concluded, he turned back to L, who had snuggled into the typically untouched pillows in the middle of the

bed, placing him at quite a close distance. Light was just about to panic about how fast L apparently wanted to move when L *yawned*.

"Excuse me," L said, blinking lazily. "It looks like I'm tired."

"Wow. Then you should probably go to sleep."

L yawned again, this time ducking his face into his chest, and then said, "Alright."

Light clicked off the lamp and tucked himself back into the covers, hyperaware of just how close L was. All these nights, it hadn't really felt like Light was sharing a bed with anyone. But now he could feel the warmth of L's body mere inches from his, and he could hear L's slowing breathing, and he could feel how the bed shifted as L wriggled into a more comfortable position. And because of all these things, Light could no longer remember exactly how to fall asleep in the first place, and for a short but excruciating while he stared up at the ceiling and tried to recall how tired he had felt when he had first gotten into bed.

And then, quite unexpectedly, L's head tipped forwards and his soft hair spilled across the pillow, tickling Light's bare arm just below the sleeve of his tee shirt, and Light realized that L had already fallen asleep. And somehow, out of everything that had happened in the past twenty minutes, this was the most incredible part.

Neither of them was able to sleep through the night, of course.

The first time, Light woke up still sweating and cursing but no longer reaching for the lamp, because he felt L warm and steady and dozing next to him and that was enough. This time the nightmare had contained the same city, but now overrun with swarming black ants, crawling up the buildings like ivy, lining the sidewalks like grass, churning in the streets like flood waters. Light did not fear or hate ants, whether in the dream or outside of it. In fact, with every step, his snug, tightly-laced dress shoes crushed dozens of ants, and with every step he sped up, now jogging, now

running, now sprinting, crushing more and more ants each second, and echoing through the streets was the sound of his laughter. Upon waking, he whispered, "I'm not Kira," and he held his shaking fingertips to his lips. "I'm not Kira. I'm not Kira." And he whispered it again and again until he fell asleep.

The second time, Light woke up in the middle of the nightmare, in the sick world but before the laughter had really started up, because L had woken him by clinging to his arm.

"I'm sorry," L whispered when Light groggily—sweating but not cursing—turned towards him. "That was an apology. I didn't mean to wake you, but—" L started loosening his grip and inching away.

"Hey." Light stopped him by fumbling for his hands in the darkness. "It's fine. You actually woke me up at a good time. So, thanks."

L took one of Light's hands and pressed it to his chest. "Do you feel that?" His voice was soft with wonder.

At first, all Light could feel was L's heart racing at an obscene pace, but, as he waited, he realized that L was calling attention to the fact that his heart was slowing. Eventually, after a few minutes, his heartbeat had settled to a steady, gentle *thump*.

"I sometimes stay up all night waiting for that to happen," L explained in a murmur. "How is it that the only person who can calm me down is Kira?" He said this last part very quietly, but still confidently, and though it was too dark for either of them to see the other's face properly, Light imagined that L was watching carefully for his reaction.

"Maybe it's a fetish," Light whispered, too genuinely terrified at the thought of being Kira to say anything else.

And L heard this in the way that Light's voice lifted and shook. He released Light's hand from where it was still pressed against his chest, and he wrapped his arms around Light's neck and tangled his legs in Light's legs in

what could only be called a full-body embrace. This was how they fell asleep, and this was how they woke up.

It was the first time either of them had been in love, and it showed. At first Light was worried that the closeness would dissolve in the daylight, but as he was buttoning his shirt that morning, L—who dressed twice as quickly—sneaked up behind him and kissed him just above his collar and buried his face in the crook of his neck, and Light laughed and relaxed in towards him, and the both of them knew it had not been a fleeting mistake. Neither of them knew what exactly to call it though. Love, relationship, and dating all sounded too trite for what felt to them a deep and unspeakably unbreakable bond between the only two people in the world who really mattered. And yet, on the other hand, they were quietly and powerfully aware of quite how brief it would inevitably be.

"Should we tell them?" L asked, leaning against the bathroom counter as Light flossed his teeth.

"What would we say?" Light returned. He took a moment to get at his back molars, and then continued, "They don't need to know anything. I'm not even planning on telling them about the cancer."

L frowned briefly. "You're not going to tell your family about your cancer?"

Light sighed, and he flossed halfway down the bottom row of teeth before speaking. "Not yet at least. I don't want them to worry."

"Well, how should I act?"

"You can act however you want. Why are we even talking about this?"

L frowned deeper. "I am not entirely oblivious to social cues, Light-kun. I understand that being involved with me in such a way is not necessarily something you would wish to broadcast, and I will respect that."

"It's not like it really matters anymore, given how little time I have left."

"And yet it does matter whether your family knows about your cancer."

"Because I don't want them to worry."

L let Light finish the rest of the bottom teeth in silence. Once Light had coiled up the floss and thrown it away, L observed, "You're speaking inconsistently."

Light sighed heavily, and as the air rushed out of his lungs, his torso curled in on itself and he ended up with his elbows on the counter and his head ducked between his arms. "I don't know," he admitted into the hollow of his chest. "I don't know what's happening. I barely even know who I am anymore. I need to just—" Light sunk his hands into his hair and pulled tight, and he remembered his tumor straining against the confines of his skull.

"You need to work," L diagnosed with a mild sigh. He pushed off the counter and sunk his hands in his jean pockets. "You're bored out of your mind."

Light froze.

"You haven't worked on the case in over sixty hours. Stress and bantering and newness are no substitute for genuine challenge." Slowly, Light felt L's slim, firm hands ease his fingers out of his hair. "Take a deep breath," L instructed, "make yourself presentable, and let's go."

"I'm not bored," Light said, unconvincingly. "I have you."

L shook his head. "It's not the same."

"How did you know?" Light now demanded, because L was right. "You even figured it out before I did."

"Because I was bored by yesterday afternoon," L said. "That was why I indulged you with the blow dryer incident, you see." Light laughed at what now was a nickname, shaking his head fondly. Something changed in L's

stance, and he lowered his voice as he said, "I suppose I have my loathsome boredom to thank for seeing you in this new light."

Of course Light leaned in at that, but L surprised him by ducking out of reach. "Don't let me distract you," he reprimanded, smirking. "Kissing me won't make you any less bored and moody."

"It's worth a try," Light shot back, puckering up, and L took another few dancing steps backwards, grinning. "Now you're the one teasing," Light accused, laughing, amazed to find himself flushing. "Will I get my kiss sometime today?"

"Yes," L promised, his hands back in his pockets, looking like his usual mischievous self. "It's just a matter of when."

And so it was that when Light had breathed deeply, swished with mouthwash and re-combed his hair, and left with L to join the rest of the taskforce, he found that he not only had to pay attention to the work that had piled up in his absence, but the astoundingly flirtatious signals that L was sending him at random intervals throughout the day.

"Can you pass me those papers, Light-kun?" L asked, and when Light did, instead of picking them up delicately with only two fingers, he took them like a normal human being so that they would have an excuse to brush hands.

"What is that you're looking at, Light-kun?" L rolled his chair over, pulling at the desk to propel himself along, and pressed his arm rest right up against Light's arm rest. "Hmm..." He leaned in even closer, so that their shoulders were touching, and he delivered some vague compliments about Light's intellect before rolling away.

"Ouch." L pouted, mournfully sticking out his bottom lip. "I've burnt myself on my tea, Light-kun," he complained, leaning in to present the lip for closer inspection. "What should I do?" And Light stumbled out of his chair and dragged L into the kitchen, where he presented L with an icepack and

narrowly avoided making a move when it turned out that Matsuda was on the other side of the freezer door.

Light couldn't find it in himself to be anything resembling annoyed, partly because it was so unexpectedly and frustratingly fun, but mostly because every time Light's headache popped up again, his heart rate would start to hike up and his head would swim, but after no longer than a minute or so, L would inevitably be there, offering Light some of his cookies or asking for a sip of his coffee or tugging discreetly at the chain, and the interaction was enough to ground him long enough to bury himself in work again.

If anyone on the taskforce thought anything unusual was going on between the two of them, they were either polite enough or horrified enough to say nothing about it. Matsuda did stammer something to Light about how he was glad that the two of them had made up after their big fight, but Matsuda was also the stupidest of them all and there was no way he would ever be the first to figure out anything in the course of his whole life.

Somehow, a mild discussion about Light's choices in statistical analysis on the Kira case had devolved into a heated debate on the legitimacy of inductive reasoning.

"Under no circumstances can you judge an argument or a rhetorical tactic solely by its practical applications or apparent viability."

"Under *no* circumstances? How can you say that when the opposite is so clearly true? Theoretical assertions are meaningless if they have no real world relevance."

"The ability or lack thereof of our human minds to understand pure, theoretical truth is a limitation not of that truth but of our minds. To say otherwise is to take a spiraling descent into a pit of hopeless postmodernism from which there is no possible return."

No blows were exchanged, no name-calling took place—other than, arguably, postmodernist—and no voices stretched above a conversational

decibel, but the taskforce was cowering in the kitchen under the guise of having a mid-afternoon meal all together because of the sheer velocity and ferocity with which each statement was hurled at the other. At one point, Matsuda could be spied peeking his head around the doorframe and wearing an expression of extreme despair at the apparent collapse of their friendship, but Light's father could be heard barking at him to get back into the kitchen, and afterwards no one dared try again.

"So, we have settled that the both of us contain in our viewpoints a strict, absolute truth," said Light, who had taken a pro-induction stand. He had turned his chair all the way towards L, and he had his feet planted widely and firmly on the ground. L's chair too was facing Light directly, but his body was curled slightly away from him, and his toes were curled fiercely around the edge of the chair. "All that remains is to reconcile whether a reasonable conclusion can be reached on the basis of past evidence and future dependability, and I assert that it most absolutely can."

"It can," L allowed, "if you are willing to make a fool of yourself." Light scowled. "Future dependability has zero meaning when the future is necessarily always unknown. Past evidence is only as constant as the circumstances surrounding that evidence. The world is continually changing, and you cannot build something as concrete and crucial as fact on such an unsteady surface."

"So you're saying that only deductive reasoning can be depended upon?"

"Yes."

"And when there are not enough facts to rely strictly on deductive reasoning?"

"Then perhaps truth will remain unknowable. It is better to accept your limitations than to be incorrect. You will object that accepting a limitation is a limitation in and of itself, but you are incorrect. I speak from experience, but you speak from idle daydreams."

"Ad hominem!" Light accused, somewhat victoriously, leaping to his feet.

L frowned, sulkily, because he had slipped up. And because he was a sore loser, he sunk only deeper into personal remarks. "Perhaps this will change your mind," he grumbled. "If I am to use only deductive reasoning, the percent chance that you are Kira is only around—" Here L flashed seven fingers and then zero, because the percentage had leapt because of the brain cancer, but he couldn't admit that to the task force. "But if I am to use inductive reasoning as well, the percent chance that you are Kira is one hundred percent."

Someone fell out of their chair in the kitchen—almost certainly Matsuda, to use inductive reasoning yet again—but Light, who now knew the deeper implications of L's accusations, was unperturbed. Very calmly, he sat back down, rolled his chair closer, and whispered, "So be it."

L went still, and then he said, quite loudly, "Yagami-kun, perhaps we can continue this conversation at a later time because I need to use the restroom."

That definitely hadn't been the response Light had been expecting. Was L going to take his private remark as a confession and arrest him in secret? At this point, Light wasn't sure whether he would necessarily resist. But before he could think of a proper objection, L had stood up and started moving at a reasonably fast pace towards the nearest bathroom. Maybe he really just had practical concerns on his mind.

The moment the bathroom door swung shut, L backed Light up against the side of the paper towel dispenser and kissed the living daylights out of him.

"Holy shit," Light mumbled into L's mouth. "Oh my—" And Light threw his arms around L's neck and stopped talking.

Soon they had shifted so that L had his back pushed against the only slightly more comfortable bathroom door, and Light was rediscovering the softness of L's hair and the taste of his neck, and L was working Light's dress shirt from out of his slacks, and that was when the door started pushing back. L and Light both paused in their ministries to stare at one

another in bewilderment, and then the door-pusher identified himself with one word: "H-hello?"

"Matsuda-san," L ground out in the quietest possible whisper, scowling. Light ducked his mouth into the crook of L's neck to muffle his laughter.

"Is this locked?" Matsuda's voice could be heard musing. The handle on the door wiggled freely, clearly unlocked, but L dug his heels in and Light kept his hands planted on the door, and Matsuda gave up after a few more half-hearted tries. "Where did they go?" Matsuda wondered mournfully, his voice trailing off as he wandered away.

They waited in silence until they couldn't hear any more footsteps. "That was close," Light finally whispered. He kissed at L's jawline so that L wouldn't think the secrecy reflected poorly on Light's feelings about him. "You pulled a real stunt surprising me like that. Can you imagine what would have happened if he had walked in on us?"

"Yes," L said, too agreeably. "This was very *dangerous*."

"Oh, *I see*." Light pulled back to see L staring at him with wide, innocent eyes. "You get off on danger, don't you? I suppose you don't deal with horrifying, terrifying crimes every day for no reason."

"Pot and kettle," L said warningly. He pulled Light closer by his belt loops, and corrected, "I get off on seeing you not bored."

Light laughed. "So, vigorous philosophical debate is what does it for you?"

"Yes," L said.

They kissed, full of the knowledge that Matsuda was still stumbling aimlessly around on the other side of the door.

"You're brilliant, you know," L murmured between kisses. "Absolutely brilliant. Light, Light, Light." And then he said it in English: "Brilliant."

"I know," Light said, and it probably wasn't the most romantic response, but it was as soft and as honest as he knew how to be.

"You're brilliant no matter what happens."

"I know," Light said, but now the words stumbled on the way out, and they clung to one another, flushed and shivering. "I know."

It was almost the end of the work day when Light realized it. He sat up straighter in his seat, compressed his mouth, and cleared his throat.

"Ryuzaki," he called, as calmly as he could. "Can you come over here?"

L rolled his chair over in that ridiculous way, and the chain coiled on the floor as it slackened.

Light crooked a finger, and L leaned in close. Light pretended to sift through a stack of papers as he whispered, "Watari has access to all the cameras in the building."

L waited a moment, and then he said, "Yes?"

"And there are cameras everywhere in the building, meaning that he can see anything that happens anywhere in the building."

L thought for another moment, and then he very quietly said, "I can assure you that Watari is very knowledgeable about how to observe in the most respectful way possible. He is not new to dealing with extreme levels of surveillance."

Light sighed impatiently. "I don't care about that. What I'm saying is that Watari might *know* by now."

L blinked twice. "Of course he knows."

Light convulsed discreetly. Once he had gotten a hold of himself, he hissed, "And do you not see any problem with that?"

"Light, you already know that Watari is the closest thing I have to a father."

"That makes it even worse."

"Besides, I speculate that he was under the impression that we were romantically involved earlier than we actually were."

L allowed Light a few seconds to figure that out, because it was obvious when you knew what to look for. "Ohhhh. So, at the hospital—? He thought that when you hit your head it was because—?"

"Well, you *were* shirtless."

"Yeah, because you were bleeding all over the floor."

"But you can see how it would look to an outside observer."

"And when he said he wouldn't look at the tapes— *Oh*."

"The both of us can be assured, based on his earlier promise and based on his character as a whole, that when—when, not if—he catches sight of something that he doesn't want to see, he won't watch. Again, he is the closest thing I have to a father."

"Oh dear god."

"It isn't nearly as bad as you seem to think. Unfortunate, perhaps, but it can't be helped."

"Are you sure he just...*won't look*? Doesn't he still suspect me of being Kira? Isn't that irresponsible of him? What if I tried to kill you?"

"Though I have not had this discussion with him, I can safely assume that he has correctly assumed that my relationship with you indicates that I have concluded that it is worth the security risk."

Light took a few moments to make sure that when he spoke, it would still be as a whisper. "You can't just let me kill you."

"If you aren't Kira, there is no risk."

"And if I am?"

"You know how I would feel about your being Kira."

Light's jaw hardened. "You're starting to sound like Misa."

Carefully, thinking through the words as he said them, L said, "Misa was the second Kira. For all my apparent statements to the contrary, I would be a fool to think that Misa was a fool. After all, she did find Kira before Kira found her."

Light's ribs constricted, and his skull was too small for its swelling contents. He stared down at the chain connecting his wrist to L's, tethering him to the earth. "I wonder," he said, "what would happen if, in the limo on our way to my next oncologist appointment, I started kissing you."

"Don't you dare," L reprimanded. "You'll give him a heart attack. Or, worse, you won't have to worry about killing me because he'll kill you. He's the closest thing I have to a father, after all."

And as Light laughed and L fought back a grin, Light's lungs expanded and filled and his mind cooled and stilled, and his heart said to him, "*We're-not Ki-ra. We're-not Ki-ra. We're-not Ki-ra.*"

They were curled with the sheets pulled over their heads. Their routine of actually taking evening showers in the evening had returned, and Light was slowly brushing the dampness out of L's hair with his fingertips. L was tracing the surface of Light's free hand, intermittently doubling back and retracing and retracing like rewriting and rewriting and rewriting a tricky Greek declension. Last week they had discovered their shared knowledge of Greek, and they had taken to occasionally drawing letters on each other's cheeks and collarbones and ribcages in lieu of speaking.

But now, both hands occupied, Light did speak, softly, the words echoing against the marble walls draped over their bare bodies. "What do you think will happen afterwards? For you, that is. Not for me."

"I used to want to be cremated," L said, knowing where Light's mind was wandering, because they were both always thinking about it. "But then the whole attempted self-immolation business happened." He sighed. "How inconvenient. I know it won't matter when I'm gone, but I can't seem to make myself put it in the will. It's left as burial with an unmarked grave stone."

Light paid special attention to making sure L's bangs were dry, and then he said, "That wasn't what I meant."

L's fingers stopped retracing, now moving absently without remembering their paths. "Are you looking for an eschatological discussion?"

"There is nothing afterwards," Light said, not answering the question. "All that is left is what impression we have made on the world. The world is all that counts."

"Do you want me to disagree with you?" L asked.

"What do you think you're going to do when I'm gone?" Light asked, again without responding to the actual words L had said.

"Most likely what I have spent the past twenty four years of my life doing."

"So you're saying that I won't have made an impression on you at all."

"You're not making any sense," L said, measuredly. His fingers had slowed until they were now almost still. "Is this going to be a debate, or shall we simply speak at one another?"

Light seriously considered the question, and then decided, "A debate. I will take the position that there is no afterlife and that the purpose of life is to have made the greatest impact possible."

"Greatest how?" L clarified. "In magnitude or in quality?"

"Both. If impact were to be measured by the range of the real numbers, the goal would be to attain the highest possible positive number."

"And I assume that I am to be devil's advocate."

"To the greatest degree possible."

L took a moment to consider which of the many disagreeing worldviews would be the most antithetical. He eventually decided, "Because I have absorbed this position so fully over the years by Watari's mere presence, I will posit that there is an afterlife, which consists of either being in the presence of God or not in the presence of God, and that the purpose of life is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever, a large component of which is being reconciled to, through, and by God."

Light's brows lifted.

"The first step to proving your opponent wrong is fully understanding their position," L said.

"You've proven Watari wrong?"

L smiled. "In my own head, which is the only place that matters." Light laughed, and L smiled wider and closed his eyes. "Go ahead and start."

"There is no rational way to come to the conclusion that any sort of afterlife exists," Light said at once. "Based on all the evidence seen so far, nothing we do in this life has any impact outside of that immediate sphere."

"Inductive reasoning," L murmured, his mouth hitching up at one side.

"How would deductive reasoning ever be relevant to an eschatological claim?"

"The historicity of Christ," L answered at once.

"That's a question that's several steps removed from anything relating to eschatology."

"Ἐὶς ἐν τῇ ζωῇ ταύτῃ ἐν Χριστῷ ἡλπικότες ἔσμεν μόνον, ἐλεεινότεροι πάντων ἀνθρώπων ἔσμέν."

Light understood over half of the words there, but his impromptu Koine Greek translation skills were rusty.

"Don't tell me you haven't read the New Testament."

"Not in *Greek*."

"That's the only way to read it properly."

"Okay, Mr. Purist, just tell me what it means."

"You probably read the King James Version too."

"Just tell me what you said."

"Terrible. Oh well. 'If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are most miserable of all people.' The ultimate truth and historicity of Christ is intimately linked to any eschatological reassurances. The one is the foundation for the other."

"If the latter is the foundation for the former, then we're back to inductive reasoning."

"Fortunately for my side of the debate, it is the former that is the foundation for the latter, therefore we are firmly grounded in deductive reasoning yet again."

Light frowned. "I don't know enough about the historicity of Christ to debate the point."

L shrugged. "The gist of it is that the historical evidence is bountiful, but, as always, inconclusive. There is nothing stopping you from saying that

perhaps an advanced alien civilization beamed the body of Christ through the graveclothes and into their spaceship, but in that case the whole of human history could be explained by one alien intervention after another."

"You're the master of percentages here. How bountiful are we talking?"

L shrugged again, sighing, because they were slipping away from the topic at hand. "Low nineties. No higher than mid-nineties. No higher than ninety-eight, certainly."

Light's eyes went wide. "Is that including inductive reasoning?"

"Not at all. Including inductive reasoning it would be a firm one hundred percent, but, as you know, I do not believe in inductive reasoning."

Light fell silent.

"I am playing devil's advocate," L reminded, but still Light did not know what to say from there. "This is all meant to be helpful to you. If it isn't, please feel free to go back to speaking at me."

Light sighed, taking the invitation. "My whole life, I've had the whole world open to me. There was nothing I couldn't do. But now I am running into a wall, and that wall is my own mortality mingled with some sort of looming existential crisis." Light's free fingers flinched in towards a fist, and they bumped into L's still hand. "That isn't true," he said, surprising himself with the discovery. "There were times when I had an existential crisis every time I went to sleep. I remember it happening as early as perhaps eight. Getting ready for bed is terrifying. You brush your teeth and stare into the mirror and see in your reflection an exact copy of every night for the rest of your life. It's like falling into a void and wishing you would hit the bottom already." He paused, precisely weaving his fingers through L's. "I knew what you were talking about when you quoted Hamlet."

L began to recite, murmuring, "'For who would bear the law's delay—'"

"No. That isn't it. 'To die; to sleep; no more.' It's all so unbearably tedious. I would rather it all stop then go on like this forever."

L's free hand started moving, tracing over the rolling seams of his and Light's knuckles. "Tedium?" He shook his head. "Terrible, perhaps, but never tedious. I am continually confronted by how cruel, chaotic, and unsolvable the world is. That does not make it worth giving up on, but that does not make it bearable either."

They fell silent, and, remembering each other's warmth, curled in towards each other, helitropic. "What is the missing two percent?" Light asked.

"Life is not beautiful," L said. "Life is not good. Life is an endless series of horror and cruelty. τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, the gospel, the good news, the good message—these are all words that express that this worldview sees life as ultimately beautiful, good, and organized for benevolent purposes. Οὕδαμεν δὲ ὅτι τοῖς ἀγαπῶσι τὸν θεόν πάντα συνεργεῖ εἰς ἀγαθόν. 'And we know that to those who love God, He works together all things for good.' Inconceivable. For all our efforts, nothing works together for good. How could anyone see this world for what it really is and not conclude that it is rotten?"

The words made Light shudder, and he did not know why. "Watari has obviously figured out a way to do it."

L's eyes had been closed for most of the discussion, but now they opened. "What are you doing?"

"Hm?"

"I thought I was playing devil's advocate."

"I thought we were just speaking at one another."

"We were, but that does not mean that you get to usurp my position. Otherwise Watari will eventually have converted us without even having been in the room."

They laughed, and shifted, and opened their linked hands so that their fingers were spread and neatly aligned.

"Has this been helpful to any degree?" L murmured.

Light shook his head.

"What brought this on?"

"I'm just starting to wonder whether there's something out there worth living for. But I suppose there isn't a pressing need to decide whether there is or not, because I don't have much time left to live."

L restrained himself for several valiant counts, and then he pointed out, "Treatment is still an option."

"I still haven't decided whether there's anything worth living for. I'm not going to dump half my brain in the trash on a hypothesis."

L was not offended that Light did not say that L was worth half of his brain, because Light was not offended that L had not said that his life would take a dramatically different course once Light was gone. They were in love, and so they could be honest with each other about their limits.

"The one thing I do know," Light said as he resumed playing with L's hair, "is that I refuse to be embalmed."

L nodded, tracing the pad of Light's thumb. "Hell, no."

Things went decisively downhill in the last week of the first month. Light had already been occasionally whispering it to himself in bed after a nightmare, but now he regularly said it out loud, in the middle of buttoning his shirt, in front of the mirror after a shower, into the sink as he washed his hands for too long: "I'm not Kira. I'm not Kira. I'm not Kira. I'm not Kira."

At first, L said nothing. But then, in the first week of the second month, he started saying things. He would say things like "Alright" or "Okay" or, finally, "I know". When L said this for the first time, when they were buried in the thick middle of that second month, Light replied, "I love you," and, again, L said, "I know."

The morning sickness also started in that thick middle. First it was every few days, then every day, then after every nightmare. When this happened in the middle of the night for the fourth time, Light said, waking up, in a panic, "Fuck, L, I'm so sorry, but it's happening again," and L said, leaping off the bed, in a cloud of worry, "*Ryuzaki, Light-kun. Please.*"

They went to three oncologist appointments, and not once did Light try to kiss L in front of Watari. On the way there, L and Light would exchange sweet philosophical and mathematical and literary nothings, and on the way back, they would not speak at all. Besides, at this point Watari had presumably been forced to recoil in horror from the security cameras so many times that it wouldn't have been terribly surprising anymore.

They almost made it three months without a seizure. The taskforce was closing in on Yotsuba, and the nightmare sickness was becoming a regular drill. But then it was day eighty-four, and the taskforce was closing in on Higuchi, and L and Light were buzzing and pleased and catching up on some much needed sleep and alone time, and they were warm and bare and tangled in the covers and each other when Light seized.

Light refused to go to the hospital until they had caught Higuchi, and that night was the first time that the two of them wept together.

4. Chapter 4

Thank you for all the lovely reviews! They really do make my heart soar. :)

I don't own Death Note.

Finally, it was over. They had caught Kira. Light would die, and he would die soon, but they had caught Kira, and that was all that mattered. If Watari took his eyes off the sights of his sniper gun, he would see Light clasping L's hand between the helicopter seats.

If Higuchi's story was to be believed, it was a notebook, of all things. "Clean," Light murmured, surprised. There was no better way for a genius with a god complex to execute his judgment on the world. L flinched, looking sharply over at Light, and it wasn't a remark that L could have disagreed with, but, impossibly, he must have still suspected Light of being Kira. Stubborn asshole. L's hand squeezed tighter, and it was an embrace and a restraint all at once.

L asked that the notebook be brought to the helicopter, and Light was already absently musing about how he would live out the last of his days now that the Kira case had been solved, and specifically whether L would be involved, when his father screamed, and, impossibly, reached into his jacket for a gun that he did not have. And then Mogi, a still and silent and imperturbable stone of a man, screamed, and collapsed.

L was no less shaken. He tugged his hand from Light, focusing, shifting, curling in on himself, tucking his legs tighter against the rest of his body, and asked again for the notebook. While Mogi and Light's father were gathering themselves, L covered his microphone and said in the barest whisper, "Please, Light, wait a moment to touch the notebook. I'm only concerned about your health."

Light sighed automatically at that, but the seizure was fresh on their minds, and Light didn't know if seizures could be triggered by shock but he certainly didn't want to risk it. "Fine. Tell me what you see though."

"Of course."

Delicately, with his thumbs and index fingers, L held the notebook, a black, slim, elegant thing, and froze. Light waited patiently for ten counts, and then he prompted, "Well? What is it?"

"Ninety seven percent," L mumbled. Light frowned briefly, again automatically, and L shook his head. "Ninety eight. No lower than ninety eight point two, certainly."

Light scowled, more offended than horrified, and reminded, covering his own microphone, "Ryuzaki, the—"

But L realized his mistake right away. "It's some kind of monster," he said absently, going through the motions, mind somewhere else. "Like a skeleton creature. Like it's rotting off its bones. Seven—no, eight feet tall."

Something clicked, and Light's heart jumped. "A skeleton?"

L's gaze flicked over, his eyes very dark. "Hm?"

"Does it have wings? Is it grinning?"

Cautiously, L answered, "No."

"Oh. Then never mind. I was just remembering—" Light broke off, embarrassed, because to his knowledge Watari still didn't know about the nightmares.

L did not look reassured.

"Can I see the monster?" Light asked, reaching out, but L flinched back, drawing the notebook along with him. "Hm."

L switched off his headphones and yanked them down around his neck. "Light-kun, please," he prompted, and Light did the same. "I hope that I have been able to describe the monster well enough to you that you will not be shocked when you see it for yourself. Remember, it is very tall, very

thin, humanoid, skeletal, and startling but not frightening. I am confident that you will not be afraid of the monster. That being said, are you ready?"

Light nodded, and, without letting go completely, L set the notebook in Light's hands. Immediately, Light began to seize.

It was utterly unlike the previous night, clearly inorganic in origin, with an onset like a shinkansen. Eyes glassy, arms and legs shuddering and jerking, jaw locked, the worst part was the flood of nightmarish thoughts.

L yanked the notebook away, and Light collapsed into his seat.

In a hard, worried tone, L demanded at once, "What did you think?"

Inexplicably, Light's heart was not racing, and his breathing was slow and even. He stared blankly at L's wide eyes and pinched mouth. "Of what?"

"Close your eyes, Light," L demanded, lunging at him as if to physically ensure he obeyed, his mind flying in unknown directions. "Please," he added belatedly, "Light-kun."

Light did so, because he did know that he had just had a seizure and that it had been bad and that he should have been upset but he wasn't.

"What did the monster look like, Light-kun?" L asked.

"I-I didn't see it."

"Why did you seize?"

"I don't know."

"What did you feel when you were seizing?"

"I can't remember."

Very carefully, L echoed, "Can't remember?"

They fell silent, and Light did not open his eyes, and was afraid that it was not over at all.

Light did not have to try very hard to convince L to let him hold the notebook again. L spent one thoughtful minute expressing his concern for Light's health, but after concluding that the decline of his health was inevitable, the both of them slipped out of the bedroom in their pajamas at two in the morning and took the elevator silently down to the lowest level of the basement.

The monster was already there.

"What are you?" L asked coolly, though with his hands fisting nervously.
"Does this notebook belong to you? Where do you come from?"

Looming silently over them, the monster did not speak. It was just as L had described it, and Light was not frightened at all.

"Who are you?" Light asked, and still the monster did not reply, but its yellow, slitted eyes fastened curiously on Light's wide, warm ones.

L had flinched towards him. "Why did you ask that?"

"Why not?"

L compressed his mouth and did not respond.

"Let's just get this over with. Maybe I should sit down, just to be safe."

Settled on the ground, Light took a deep breath and L placed the notebook in his open palms. Light seized for ten full seconds, and then he stopped, abruptly. His eyes flashed open, and met the gaze of the shinigami. Then he met L's gaze. He began to shake.

"Well?"

Light gritted his teeth, and bit through the very edge of his lip. His eyes narrowed. The God of the New World was dying.

L attempted, casually, to pull the Death Note away, but Light held on tight. He remembered now that if he let go without first killing Higuchi and regaining his ownership, he would forget it all. The plan had been to write Higuchi's name in the slip in his watch with his own blood, but how could he do that now, with L undistracted, unfrightened, and watching his every move? Frustration bubbling, a precious second ticking away, then another, then a third, he bit harder into his bleeding lip and tasted sharp failure.

No. This was his blood, and he tasted victory. He would write himself a note on his arm with the blood from his lip, and the next time he was alone, when L was bathing or pissing or shitting, he would open the watch and kill Higuchi and make sure to keep a finger on the shred of the Death Note and that would be enough to give him full ownership. Now he just had to hold onto the Death Note long enough to write the message.

Four seconds had passed, and L was still watching him suspiciously. "The seizure passed," he breathed, mouth cracking into a relieved smile. "Now I can really investigate this. Do you mind if I look inside? You can still hold onto it, of course." His eyes crinkled, carefully, fondly, at L, who frowned.

"Let's see." Light licked his thumb and index finger, to give him more traction for turning the pages, and picked up a heavy drop of blood from his lip on his middle finger. "Hmm..." He pored over the first page of names, and, holding the Death Note with his left hand, wrote with his right middle finger on the inside of his left wrist, just behind that horrible handcuff, the first two characters of the hiragana for the word "clock": とけ. He went through the same process for the next page, and he reoutlined the け and added the ん. And finally, just as L was really starting to get suspicious of his incredibly unhygienic finger licking, he thoughtfully rested his chin against his palm, picking up just enough blood to add a 1' 4, telling himself to pull the knob of the watch four times in less than one second intervals. It was crude, but it was as much as he could get down safely.

It was fortunate that L had picked up some absurd notions about not wanting to shatter Light's delusions about being innocent. He had waited until now, stressed and conflicted to the point of barely breathing at all, to yank the Death Note all the way out of Light's grasp, and—

"Light-kun," L said, holding the notebook in his lap. "If you don't mind, I would like to—"

"Ouch," Light muttered, dabbing lightly at the corner of his mouth, which stung and bled steadily. "At least it wasn't my tongue."

"Your eyes," L murmured.

"I beg your pardon?"

L shook his head. "Light-kun, I hate to ask this of you, but would you mind holding onto the notebook all the way through your seizure once again?"

Light sighed. "Once," he agreed. "But if I bite my tongue this time, I'm not touching that anymore as much as I can help it." He reached out, and—

Goddammit, he was a fucking idiot when he couldn't remember a damned thing. But more importantly, why was L looking at him like—?

"Thank you, Light-kun," L said, pulling the notebook away again. "I'm sorry for the trouble of you having to go through this three times in the span of only a few hours. I completely understand if you would like to rest now."

L was being oddly formal about all this. With an embarrassed peek at the monster out of the corner of his eye, Light reached out to L, affectionately, and L flinched, pulling the notebook out of the way. Light frowned, wounded. He was also concerned by the amount his lip was bleeding. Maybe it was for the best that L apparently did not want to be kissed right now.

"You should sleep, Light-kun. Everything will be clearer in the morning."

"I'm not *tired*," Light snapped, bewildered. "Even if I don't touch the notebook anymore because of the seizures, there's no reason we can't investigate it together."

"I have seen all I have to see," L said, distantly. He stood and put the notebook back in the secure mechanized platform that sunk into the floor when it was closed. L had made Light turn around when he had opened it, and Light had obeyed, resigned, so that there now was no hope of Light figuring out how to get in.

Helplessly, Light said, "But you barely saw anything. What are you talking about?"

"I cannot tell you right now," L said, looking genuinely apologetic as he bit at the skin around his thumbnail. "Please, Light-kun, allow yourself to be content with the end result of this case. We may never fully understand how this notebook works or what this monster is, but the important thing is that we solved the Kira case. Higuchi is in jail, and justice has prevailed."

Light felt himself go slowly cold, in ripples washing down his torso. "You're lying to me," he said, surprised. "There's something big that you're not telling me. You would never just give up on figuring out how Kira did it. You would investigate every bit of this notebook, and you would trap this monster and interrogate it, and you would keep me handcuffed until you

gathered enough evidence to convict me alongside Higuchi. In fact, Higuchi being Kira now would be part of the evidence against me, because you would show how Higuchi could not have been the first Kira. But you're saying that you won't do any of this. So either you're lying to me about this, or you're lying to me about what's going on."

L's mouth pinched into a thin, white line, and he looked away. "I will tell you this one thing, and then we will not discuss this further. We will go straight to bed, and we will sleep. Understood?"

After a moment, Light nodded, but L was not looking to see his response.

"Light-kun, with only deductive reasoning, the chance that you are Kira is ninety-nine point seven percent."

True to his silent promise, Light did not respond. Instead, he twined his fingers together and stared down at the veins threading through his fragile wrist.

And then he saw the blood. There was blood smeared on the inside of his wrist, and it looked an awful lot like it was spelling something out. He blinked hard, sure it was an illusion, like picking out a leering face in a mess of dry, autumn leaves, but still the characters remained: とけい 1' 4. Then he saw the other blood. There was blood smeared on the very tip of the middle finger of his right hand, and it looked an awful lot like it had been the one doing the spelling. He must have written himself a message while he had been seizing. Surely L had seen him do it. If he just asked, L would tell him what had happened.

But then Light stopped, first because they had agreed not to talk anymore, then second because L was keeping secrets too.

Light was rinsing off after his regular morning sickness, careful to keep his dry hair—except for the traces of sweat at his temples—out of the warm shower stream. He had stopped eating after six o'clock a long time ago, which reduced most of his sickness to empty heaving, but that didn't make

it any less disgusting. Now, clean, but unwilling to get out just yet, he turned his hands upwards and imagined that he could still see the blood streaked along his wrist. But most of it had worn off, smeared and dried somewhere in the bed sheets, and the rest had been long soaped away. とけ
ゞ 1' 4.

The shower curtain rustled and the chain rattled, and L invited himself in, stripped completely bare, and sat on the edge of the bathtub. His feet dipped into the pooling water, and stray shower spray misted towards him.

"Hey," Light said. L nodded once, not looking at him. "You'd better not be planning on shoving me and getting my hair wet. I'm not really in the mood." The warning was unnecessary. L didn't look much like he was in the mood to do anything, despite the obvious fact that the both of them were naked in a shower together. Light tried to busy himself with something related to actually showering, but he had been finished a long time ago, which L probably knew, which was why he was intruding. "Hey," Light said again, this time flicking water at L, who didn't flinch. "What's up?"

L compressed his mouth and his bangs obscured his eyes. Then he stood, and Light stepped aside so he could join the shower spray. L looked very worried, and he reached up to hold Light's face, careful not to touch his hair, and Light cradled his elbows. "Can I see your eyes?" he asked.

Light answered yes with his gaze, and L looked carefully at his eyes, not into them, flicking from one to the other.

And then he did look into them, and he asked, "Light-kun, if Yagami Light was Kira, but he no longer remembers being Kira, is he still Kira?"

"Yes," Light answered immediately.

"Why?"

"He knew what he was doing at one point. He is responsible for his conscious actions, even if he no longer remembers them."

L did not reply for a long time. The spray started getting cold, and Light shifted to twist it to hotter water, but then L said, "Yagami Light."

"Yes."

"Then you are Kira."

Light swallowed, and reached all the way over to fix the shower temperature.

"You are Kira because you once were Kira, but then you forgot. However, it did not have to do with your brain cancer. I was wrong. It was because of this notebook, and perhaps this monster, but it was not because of your brain. You understood what was happening the whole time."

L was still holding Light's face, and Light leaned his cheek into L's palm. "Kira would have given up his memory voluntarily, not to hide from it, but for some strategic purpose."

"How would Kira get his memory back?"

Light's right hand, holding L's left elbow, flinched towards his left wrist.

"There was blood on my arm," Light said.

"I know."

Light's heart sped up, because he was afraid.

"What did it say?"

"とけい 1' 4."

"Hm."

"I wrote it."

"Of course you did. Do you think I didn't see you?"

"I don't remember doing it."

"Did you decide to forget?"

Light shook his head. "If I was choosing to forget, I wouldn't have needed to write myself a note."

"What does the note mean?" Light hesitated, and L gave a hint of a smile. "You're too clever to not have given yourself all the information."

"It's my watch. とけい。 One second. Four. I'm sure I could figure it out after tinkering with the watch for a minute."

"Much less than a minute," L scoffed. "It takes me no more than twenty seconds to pee."

Light cracked a smile, but his heart raced at the realization that L knew when it was that he would have tried to puzzle out the watch himself.

They shut off the water and dried off and sat on the cool tiles in their towels, Light with his loosely around his waist and L with his draped over his shoulders. It took them seven seconds and three halting beginnings of sentences to decide to start with the crown. L wanted to push the crown, because pulling it would change the date and time, but Light knew that it would have been easier to change the function of something than to add a whole new mechanism altogether, so he decided to pull it instead. The first time he pulled too slowly, leaving a whole second and a little bit more in between. The second time he pulled just a bit faster, and the compartment popped open. It took nineteen seconds altogether.

Inside the compartment was a slip of paper and a pin. Light knew right away that the paper had been torn from the notebook, and that the pin was for pricking himself and writing a name in his own blood. "Holy fuck."

L smacked the watch out of Light's hand and pinned him to the ground. Light's heart raced, and L's eyes were wide and wild. "You don't have to be Kira," L said. He did not add "for me", because the both of them knew that

Light would never be Kira for only one person. They did not, however, know the same of L.

"Was this my plan?" Light asked, horrified. "Did I give up my memory so I would fall in love with you and then try to get you on my side to take over for me when I died?"

"You didn't know about the brain cancer," L said.

Light craned his neck to look over at the watch. For who knew how long, the pulse in his right wrist had been beating against a weapon of mass destruction. "What happens if I touch the paper?"

L did not speak, because there was only one way to find out. He sat back, letting Light go free.

"Don't let me kill anyone, okay?" Light said, still lying prone on the floor.

L nodded.

When Light took the paper out of the watch, he seized, just like every time before, and afterwards he reached to pull his towel tighter around his waist. "Goddammit," he said, with a laugh. "You've got me."

L crouched low to the ground, and Light recognized it as a fighting stance. More than that, he remembered the name. It was capoeira that L had been using this whole time, a dance that L had usurped for his own violent purposes. Maybe Light really could get L on his side.

"Did you learn that from Naomi?" Light wondered aloud.

L's mouth pinched, and genuine anger flickered in his eyes. He had not been expecting Kira to look like this. "You killed her."

"Beyond Birthday was your best friend serial killer," Light said, with some surprise. He laughed, again, and L flinched, mouth twisting downwards into

a grimace. "The blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb. Are you so unlike him? Are we so unlike each other?"

L lunged. He spun and jackknifed his foot upwards, either towards Light's face or towards the hand holding the piece of the Death Note. So predictable. Light threw his left hand up, and the chain snagged around L's foot as it came down, tripping him. He landed on the ground hard, disoriented, and Light tossed the rest of the chain over L's head and around his neck. L's eyes bugged and his hands scrabbled. He tried kicking Light off, but the chain was still around his ankle, and extending his leg that much pulled the already taut chain even tighter around his neck. He gagged terribly.

"I'm not going to kill you," Light said. "Just don't move for a second, okay?"

L was having none of this. He curled his leg towards himself, slackening the chain, but Light just used this new slack to pull farther away, giving him more space to move freely. L was really struggling now, presumably because less than a minute ago he had said he wouldn't let Light kill anyone, so Light wrapped the chain once more about L's neck, and set to work on holding the Death Note scrap between his middle finger and his ring finger, and painstakingly wrote Higuchi's name in his blood with the pin held between thumb and index finger. Now it was just a matter of waiting. Light mouthed the numbers, so he wouldn't lose track and let go of the Death Note scrap too early, and in the meantime, L writhed, fading as his air ran low. Light was not concerned, because the worst that could happen would be for L to pass out.

For a flash of a terrifying moment, Light remembered Watari and the security cameras, and realized that Watari might be on his way down with a gun at this very minute. But then just as quickly he remembered that Watari almost certainly would have seen L climb into the shower with Light and immediately would have turned away. Morning showers together, Light recalled with a bewildering mix of disdain, incredulity, and fondness, were

not so rare as to be suspicious. It would be at least another ten minutes before Watari dared check the cameras again.

After this brief pondering, L's eyelids were fluttering, and there were only seventeen seconds left. When this was over, Light would have to revert to his previous self. This had been a necessary personality shift, but any further acting out would only be counterproductive. Surely it would not be unbelievable for Kira to love L as Light once did.

Then the forty seconds were over, and Light felt the memories solid and unchangeable in his skull, rooted as deeply as the tumor, or perhaps even in it. He let go of the Death Note scrap, and he was still himself. He allowed himself a moment to smile, and breathe, and then he cried out and set to work on untangling L from his chains. "Holy shit," Light said, and his voice and his hands shook just as he wanted them to. "Oh my— Are you—?" The chain lifted away, revealing deep indents in L's neck which would soon turn to bruises. "I don't know how— God, L, I'm so sorry—"

Quite calmly, though wheezing, L sat himself up and turned away from Light, ignoring his words. The bones of his spine stood out sharp and curved. Light began a few more sentences with just the right balance of horror and apology, and then he trailed off, as if words were not enough.

Finally, L said, "*Ryuzaki*, Kira-kun." His voice was rough and bruised.

Light frowned, in case L was watching. "I'm still Light. I'm still the same person. You don't understand. That—that wasn't me back there." The stammering made L flinch, then relax, just slightly, and so Light played it up even more. He glanced nervously over at the watch, swore, and ducked his head into his hands, crumpling slowly against the cupboards under the sink, pulling steadily at his hair with tense, shaking fingers. "God, L, I'm so sorry. Fuck. Please. You have to help me."

L sighed, and coughed. "Watari isn't coming," he said, wearily.

So L had known when he had gotten into the shower that there was a risk he wouldn't leave the bathroom alive. Why would he have taken such a risk?

Had this been a set-up, so that Light would be convicted as Kira even if L wasn't alive to see it? It didn't make sense, because Light could almost certainly argue his way into a manslaughter conviction, even involuntary manslaughter. Besides, killing L didn't mean he was Kira, and L was probably the only one smart enough to follow the convoluted reasoning that led to the conclusion that Light was Kira at all. If this had been a last ditch attempt to bring Light to justice, it had been a stupid one. What was going on?

"But you've slipped up, Kira-kun."

Light wanted to snap, "How?" but he couldn't, and so he remained silent instead.

"These bruises will be too suspicious. Watari will know something has happened. He might wonder about BDSM, but he'll be willing to risk seeing that to make sure I wasn't attacked. But I was. And he will find out. I have no choice but to arrest you, and Watari will be upset that I am only doing that much."

L's voice was slow, meandering, and sad. Light was struck by an impossible thought. Did L not *want* to bring Light to justice anymore? More importantly, did he not want to bring Kira to justice anymore? Could it be that L was already on Kira's side without Light having to convince him of anything? How could Light find out without giving himself away?

Perhaps...honesty?

"I don't understand," Light said, lifting his face, peeking out through his defenses to let his genuine confusion flow through. "What are you talking about?"

"Who is asking?"

There were infinite answers, and many right answers, but only a handful of answers that would be effective. Light chose the following: brokenly, he sunk to the floor and said, "Both. Yagami Light is Kira. And I understand

how this must look to you, but you have to let me explain. Please, let's just get dressed and talk this through. You have to understand."

"What must I understand?"

Fuck. Light had hoped he would have more time to figure out what his strategy was going to be. He was going to have to wing it and decide as he spoke. "I am Kira, but the person you saw back there was not me. I would never have done that to you. It was the Death Note, forcing my hand. Higuchi and I couldn't be Kira at the same time. Either Higuchi would kill me, or I would have to kill Higuchi."

"You're saying there cannot be two Kiras?"

Light knew where L was going with this. "Misa was a different type of Kira than I was." And then he was struck by a thought, and was thrilled that he had thought to say this. "I'm not phrasing it right. Kira is a name, not a description. I am the only Kira there ever has been. Misa and Higuchi played at it, but they were not me. They did not understand me. There has only ever been one person who was like me." And here he paused, meaningfully, so L would know that Light was talking about him.

And then he continued, hurriedly, as if not wanting to imply too much, "But there cannot be two owners of a given Death Note. Misa owned a Death Note, but it was not mine. Higuchi owned a Death Note, and it was mine. Misa and I can both exist with our memories of being Kira, but Higuchi and I could not both exist. One of us had to go. The Death Note forced my hand, pushed everything that was Light to the side so that I would survive. Can you honestly say you're displeased that between of Higuchi and myself, I am the one alive?"

L absorbed this, and then asked, "Is the Death Note sentient?"

"No," Light said, hints of surprise leaking through, because the question had never occurred to him. "But that doesn't mean that it isn't powerful."

"Do you take full responsibility for your murder of Higuchi?"

Hidden in the question was this one: do you take full responsibility for what you did to me?

So Light did not answer the question. "I'm Kira, and you are wondering about whether I am responsible for one death?"

And L said, "Yes," and forced him to answer.

Light was quiet for a moment, thoughtful, and then he said, "If I was seizing and I hit you and you were hurt, would it be my fault?"

The response was immediate. "Of course not."

"When I had my nightmare and I struck out at you and you hit your head, was it my fault?"

"Are you saying that being Kira is a sickness that absolves you of responsibility?"

"The Death Note is the sickness, and being Kira is the cure."

L fell silent. He had never thought of it this way before, and, to be perfectly honest, until about three seconds ago neither had Light.

"The moment you learn of the existence of such a thing, you are burdened with enormous responsibility. What will you do with it? Destroy it? Lock it up? Give it to the police? Or use it for good?"

"Something so terrible cannot be used for good."

"No? Can't a virus be used by a doctor for a vaccine? Can't a gun be used by a police officer to protect a child? Can't a knife be used by a surgeon to remove a tumor?"

This last one struck home, and L flinched. "And Kira is using the Death Note for justice."

It was true, but it was not what L wanted to hear. "Kira is using the Death Note for good."

Too quickly to anticipate or react to, L looked over his shoulder. Light did not know what to do with his face, but he knew that he had to do something with it, and so he struggled in vain towards a more appropriate expression —but of what? solemnity? conviction? tenderness? All L saw was the struggle. He saw enough. He stood. Dammit.

"We can discuss this further while you are in prison. Please, Kira-kun, let's get dressed."

Light couldn't believe he was being arrested. He was furious, but he let it show as fear. "B-but what about my oncology appointments?"

L bit at his thumbnail and said with wide eyes, "Who said you wouldn't be permitted to go to them? I'm not going to kill you."

L was echoing him.

"I am the one arresting you, Kira-kun. Officially, Yagami Light is and always has been a free man."

Light probably shouldn't have been questioning it, but he knew that L was expecting him to. "Why are you doing this? You have enough evidence to convict me."

Despite his apparent desire to answer the question, L did not reply.

Light thought hard, staring blankly at the ground, and then up at L's face, questioning. His eyes held an emotion Light had considered and rejected. Tenderness.

"You still love me," Light gaped. "You love me even though I'm Kira."

"I've known you were Kira the whole time. This is only a new discovery to you."

"You said you'd love me even *more* if it turned out I was Kira."

The tenderness did not fade, but it certainly dropped out of sight. "It is possible I was mistaken. I love you precisely the same amount, Yagami Light."

It was horrifying. What had Light done? He had not expected this level of loyalty, and it made him afraid, and careless. "I love you too, Ryuzaki," he said, standing, reaching affectionately, and L grimaced and flinched away.

Light had used the right name—or, rather, the wrong one.

5. Chapter 5

Thank you all for the amazing reviews! They mean so much to me. :)

There was an awesome clarifying question about whether Light needed ownership over the Death Note in order to have his memories back for good. I double checked with Death Note Wiki on their page for the chapter Inside, and it confirmed what I had been remembering: "Holding a Death Note, even one he did not previously own, would restore his memories, but if he let go of that Death Note without reclaiming ownership then his regained memories would once again vanish." Thanks for keeping me accountable!

I don't own Death Note, Atlas Shrugged, The Odyssey, or The Illiad.

It was the confinement all over again, except this time L was not bothering with the handcuffs. In fact, that was almost the strangest part. It had been months since Light could move without the rattling of some kind of chain, and now that there was no rattle, it was as if he couldn't be as certain of his movements. It had only been a few hours and already Light had taken to drumming his fingertips against the metal of the bedframe, just to assure himself that he was still alive.

"How are you going to explain where I am?" he asked when L deigned him with his presence again. He was sitting on the edge of his cot in a plain set of black cotton clothes, looking into the camera in the corner of the room.
"My father is going to lose his shit."

"That has already been taken care of. I told the taskforce myself, right after I congratulated them and told them that they could all go home."

Light was shocked. "The Kira case is over?"

"Kyosuke Higuchi is Kira, and Kira is dead. Legal action is being taken against Yotuba, of course, but that is none of our concern."

Light was horrified enough to retch. "The world thinks that Kira was Higuchi all along?"

"Yes."

Light slammed a fist against the bedframe and it rattled terribly. "Fuck."

In a crackly murmur through the speakers, "I'm—"

"*FUCK.*" Light fell to the ground. "*FUCKING HELL.*"

"I will give you a moment."

L hadn't given him anything but a slap in the face. He had ruined everything. Light had no doubt that the vast majority of the world would swallow the idea that Higuchi had been Kira from the beginning. L had destroyed every bit the image that Light had so carefully constructed, especially because Light had no way of building it back up. This was a thousand times worse than Misa's blundering attempts at emulation.

Misa.

Could Misa begin killing again? She didn't necessarily have to do a good job of it. In fact, it was better if she didn't do a good job of it. All that was needed was attention, and doubt. She could say that she was not Kira, but that Kira had given her power to proclaim the truth, that she was a prophet. Even God had been silent for four hundred years. Yes, Kira would be silent. Such a man as Kyosuke Higuchi had proclaimed himself as Kira, and the world had believed him. Now Higuchi had been struck down for his blasphemy, and the world would be abandoned to their evil ways. There would be no judgment, for a time. Let the world beg for their Kira to return to them.

But how would he get in contact with Misa? L could see and hear Rem now. She was practically useless to him. But he couldn't see Ryuk. Surely, Ryuk would come back for him. Ryuk had spent the past five months in the shinigami realm, presumably peeking down every once in a while to check

on the whole Kira situation, his boredom simmering. Light could count on Ryuk noticing that the killing had stopped, patiently waiting for it to start up again, and getting frustrated when all was going as usual. He would find Light, try to figure out what was going on, and make contact eventually. It was only a matter of time.

L had not ruined anything. In fact, L had forced his hand, and now Kira's legacy would be stronger than ever.

It had been less than a minute. Light pulled himself up off the floor and sat carefully on the cot, which squeaked. Light could practically see L leaning forward towards the video screen, biting at this thumb, eyes wide and questioning. Light smiled. "What did you tell my father about where I am?"

As Light had expected, L was at the microphone right away. "You're sure you're ready to hear it?" His voice was suspicious and slow, bewildered at Light's quick recovery.

"I'm sure."

"Alright then. I told him the truth."

"That you're illegally detaining me because I'm Kira?"

"No. I told him that you have brain cancer."

Light's jaw locked. It was a childish, unfair move. The brain cancer wasn't part of the game.

"I told him that you didn't want to tell him or the rest of the family, but that I had thought he deserved to know. I told him that I was paying for all your medical expenses and that I would personally be present for all your medical procedures. He wanted to know whether he could see you, and I told him that he could not at the moment, out of respect for your wishes, but that I would let him know as soon as he could."

"You didn't tell him the truth. That last part was a lie."

"I wasn't lying, Light-kun."

It was the first time L had called him that since Light had remembered.

"If you want your father to see you down here, with my one hundred percent certainty that you are Kira, I will allow it."

Bastard.

"If I was incorrect in my assessment of your wishes, then I apologize."

It was the most straightforward of all apologies, and the least relevant, because L had been right.

"Well?"

"He wouldn't understand. It would be cruel to him."

"And Kira would never be cruel."

"Of course not. Remember, Kira is good."

"You mean, righteous."

Light did mean righteous, but righteousness wouldn't be any help to him where L was concerned. "No, I mean good."

When L spoke again, his voice was mocking. "Is this another of those things that only the two of us understand?"

Light laughed. L knew what he was doing, but that didn't mean he would be any less susceptible to it. "This time, no, actually. There are millions of us, perhaps even billions. And then one day it will be all of us."

L murmured, "At the name of Kira, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth."

The words sent a thrill of delight through Light's body, and it must have shown on his face because L laughed, just once, sharp and humorless. Light's brows dropped, angrily. "What?"

"You are not Christ. You are not infallible, you are not peaceful, and you are not loving. Most of all, you are not good. You may deceive the world, but you will never deceive me. And I will tell you why, even though you already know, because you were the one who told me. It is because I am not good either."

Light scowled. "And yet just a few hours ago you were the one who said you loved me."

"I do, as much as I know how." L sighed. "I understand what you are trying to do, but it will never work for one simple reason. You say you are making a new world where all people are good, but there are no good people. You are not good, and I am not good. Watari is not good. Even your sister Sayu —"

Light leapt to his feet. "Hey!"

"You're so defensive," L marveled. "Do you really think she has never done anything wrong? Never lied? Never insulted someone? Never passed by someone in need and done nothing?"

"Doing one thing wrong doesn't make you evil."

"Perhaps not. But it certainly makes you not good."

"Sayu is a good person. I don't see how you could say that she's not."

"What is the cut off? Must fifty percent of your actions be good? Ninety percent? Ninety five percent?"

Light fisted his hands in frustration. "Why does it always come back to percentages?!"

"Moreover, you are trying to terrify people into goodness. But forced goodness is no goodness at all. It's no credit to you that you are not murdering anyone at the moment considering that I have made you unable to."

"It's not murder," Light snapped. "It's execution."

"I can no longer see any justice in the death penalty. Protect the public, yes, but do not delude yourself into thinking that you are any better than the human being you are strapping to an electric chair."

"The only murderers are those who kill the innocent."

"Then send me to my execution."

Light remembered L listing off his traumas, and was silent.

"And if I am not mistaken, the FBI agents were innocent as well, as was Misora Naomi."

"Necessary sacrifices."

"So you will make excuses for yourself, but not for anyone else."

"I don't consider you a murderer."

L was very much not expecting that. "Don't tell me you consider me a good person."

"Never."

"Good." There was a smile in his voice, so Light frowned.

"What are you even planning on doing with me? Keeping me away from a Death Note until I die of natural causes?"

"Yes."

Light flinched. "And what if I say I want treatment?"

L did not respond for a long time. "Are you really saying you want treatment?" he finally asked, and his voice shook.

It was worth a try at least. He couldn't very well be God of the New World from a coffin. "Yes."

"Then I will do the same, except that we will be going to the hospital far more frequently."

"And if I live for another five years? Or ten years?"

"I will not change my mind, even if you live another eighty years."

Light thought for a moment, and then asked, "What if I forget again?"

L was quiet, and then something changed. "You're being cruel, Kira-kun," he snapped.

Light was very rarely cruel without meaning to do so, so this surprised him.
"What do you mean?"

But L was gone, or, more likely, giving him the silent treatment.

At first, Light resisted napping out of a habitual fear of nightmares, but he soon discovered that he had nothing to fear. The nightmares were just no longer there. In fact, the dreams were no longer there, period. Of course. Light had stopped dreaming a long time ago. Kira had only one dream, and it would one day be a reality.

So it was during one of these many naps, which stretched and compressed time until it was so warped that the napping no longer felt like a waste, that the crackly, low voice of Watari finally spoke.

"Yagami Light."

He did not say it very loudly, but there was not very much noise in this cell—for though it was well-furnished, with a bed and a toilet and even a shower and a sink and a door instead of bars, it was a cell all the same—and no one had spoken to him for seven meals worth of time, so Light woke up right away.

"I am sure L has told you that I am like a father to him."

There was no point in using code names now that there was no one else in the building. "I believe L's exact words were that you were the closest thing he had to a father."

Watari did not speak for a number of seconds, and Light wondered whether he had been unintentionally cruel once again. "Nevertheless," Watari said, clearing his throat, "L is like a son to me, and you know how protective parents can be."

"Your son locked me up in prison. I don't think he needs any protecting."

"You strangled him."

"Didn't you hear me over the recording? I said I wasn't going to kill him."

"Well, unlike L, I have no qualms about capital punishment, and I think that you deserve to die."

Light grinned, terribly. "Then perhaps Kira has more support in here than he realized. One of you wants to keep me alive, and the other wants criminals to die."

"Shut up."

Light's smile dropped. "What are you trying to tell me? You wouldn't go behind L's back for no good reason."

"I'm warning you to not hurt him. If I wake up one day and he's gone, I will find you and I will kill you."

Watari had to be at least seventy years old, but Light had seen him with a sniper rifle, and he had raised such a person as L, and Light did not underestimate him. "I genuinely am not planning on killing him," Light disclosed. "I won't pretend that wasn't my plan from the beginning, but things have changed, and I'm not going to kill him."

"That's not the only kind of gone I mean."

Did Watari know that Light was planning on turning L into Kira?

"Why would I hurt him? Haven't you heard? I love him."

"I don't believe that for a second."

"You think I don't love him?"

"I know that loving someone doesn't mean you won't hurt them."

"I thought you Christians were the ones who believed in love. Love never fails, and God is love, and all that jazz."

"We love because He first loved us. You know nothing about God, and you know nothing about love."

"Well, excuse me. You obviously do, and you're doing such a good job of showing it. In fact, I may convert right this instant."

Now it was L's voice over the microphone, distant and sad. "Please, Watari."

"L! I thought you were—"

"I've had enough sleep for tonight. I'll take over, and you can get some rest."

"I didn't—"

"Please, Watari. You've said perfectly enough."

The soft static of the microphone cut off, and returned a few moments later.
"Good evening, Light-kun."

Impossibly, Light had almost started missing L. He had been spoiled rotten by the handcuffs. "Good evening, L."

The air was tense between them. To what extent was there truly any love there? Light would have liked to say that it was all one-sided, if that, but he had let his guard down more than he had expected in giving up his memories, and he couldn't just pretend the last three months hadn't happened. There had been the obvious things, like sleeping together, but there had also been the little things, like having L beside him when he threw up every morning. The loneliness hadn't been there in the first confinement, and hadn't been common before that period, and Light didn't know what to do with it now.

"So, what's up?"

"Light-kun, what is your opinion of *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand?"

Light smiled, and the two of them spent a full twenty minutes tearing it to pieces.

It wasn't often that they agreed so wholeheartedly, and Light lay on his cot in the semi-darkness and wished for L to be in bed with him, and was afraid. He was just horny, he tried to tell himself, that it was unfortunate but nothing to be worried about, but he knew it was untrue. Then he told himself that L would become Kira soon, and then there would be nothing between the two of them anymore, and that made him feel a bit better.

Still, he was fidgety and displeased, and without realizing it he started tracing the Greek alphabet against the sheets, and by the time he got to ξ, L had noticed.

"Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα," he said, and Light smiled, "πολύτροπον, ὅς μάλα πολλὰ—"

"πλάγχθη," Light picked up at once, "Ἐπεὶ Τροίης Ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον
ἔπερσεν,"

And so they continued reciting *The Odyssey*, each taking one line, until they made it to the tenth line, and Light had not bothered to memorize it any farther than that. L went for another thirty-three lines on his own, and then even his memory was exhausted. So then he pulled it up on his laptop and continued reading, and that was how Light fell asleep that night, and every night after that for the next two weeks.

Ryuk had not showed up yet, and now Light was leaving his prison and running the risk of missing Ryuk's arrival entirely.

But Light couldn't very well say that. "Sorry, L. I know I promised I would pursue getting treatment so I could survive to legal age and possibly have a long-term relationship with you, but I'm waiting for a shinigami who will help me take over the world and that's more important than anything I could ever have with you. Can we maybe reschedule for next week? We could read *The Illiad* in the meantime."

To be perfectly honest, Light didn't even like saying things like that in the privacy of his own mind.

Light was handcuffed and blindfolded, of course. But it was L's gentle hands that did the binding, and that spun him around to disorient him, and when Light was so disoriented that it was only L's hands keeping him upright at all, it was L that kissed his mouth, only for Watari to make a noise of alarm and pull L away and be the one to firmly hustle Light to the limo.

For the first time in three months, L sat shotgun, and Light was buckled into the middle seat by himself.

L and Watari genuinely trusted the oncologist Light was seeing, and for good reason. She didn't do so much as a double take when she saw that Light was now the only one who was handcuffed. She also knew at once

that something far more important was different. "What's changed?" she demanded.

"What do you mean?" Light asked.

"You want to live now. I can see it in your eyes. What happened?" She nodded towards L, whose eyes widened. "Did he propose to you?" she asked Light.

Watari started spluttering, but Light just said, "No."

She shook her head. "You wait three months and *then* decide you want treatment. Typical. Well, I'll look over your scans, and we'll see what we can do. Come back in a week for my decision." She pulled over her rolling stool and pulled out her tablet. "Until then, let's talk about your symptoms in the past month."

Light told her about the vomiting and how it had been getting worse, and then better in the past two weeks, because he only threw up in the mornings instead of in the middle of the night now.

"You're better rested," she observed. "Lull in the nightmares?"

Light flinched and went red, because this was not something that they had discussed before.

"I had to bring it up eventually. Well?"

Horrified that it had apparently been so obvious, Light said, "Yeah, lull in the nightmares."

"Any non-confidential changes in your eating or sleeping patterns?" She didn't even glance at the handcuffs as she said this. Incredible.

"My eating is more regular, and I'm sleeping more."

"Are you sleeping alone?"

Light went a deeper shade of red, and Watari may have stopped breathing, but Light said, "Yes."

"I see." She now turned her attention to L. "Are you eating more regularly and sleeping more?"

L was embarrassed as well, and his mouth pinched, but he pulled himself together and answered. "No."

"Less or the same?"

"Less."

"Are you sleeping alone?"

"Yes."

"Lull in the nightmares?"

"No."

"Worse or the same?"

"Worse."

"I see. I would encourage you to modify your eating and sleeping patterns, because when his health deteriorates, you're going to have to be healthy enough to take care of him. Understood?"

"Yes."

They continued through the list of possible symptoms until they hit seizing, at which point Light had to figure out how he was going to explain what had happened. "A little more than two weeks ago, I had a minor seizure. Déjà vu and inability to speak, but no motor issues or hallucinations." Commenting on how Light had obviously done his research was unnecessary, so she did not comment. "I've also had a handful of motor

seizures that were very different and that should not be considered in generating a treatment plan."

She trusted him absolutely, and made a few notes on her tablet then moved through the rest of the symptoms. When they were done, she said, "Now that you are compliant, I am prescribing you prochlorperazine for the nausea. The possible side effects are confusion, drowsiness, dizziness, gastrointestinal upset, excitability, nightmares, uncontrollable muscle movements, and lip smacking or chewing movements, but of course when it comes to medication, anything can happen, so really just tell me if anything changes. Do you understand?"

Light hated to bring this up again, but he had to ask. "Nightmares?"

Her eyes were hard and kind. "Yes. Remember, feel free to experiment with your eating or sleeping patterns. And"—here she turned to L, ignoring Watari altogether—"indulge him, but take care of yourself. Understood?"

Both L and Light nodded.

"I am not prescribing you any medication for the seizures yet. I want to see how you respond to the prochlorperazine without adding anything else, and I want to form a long-term treatment plan before I decide what to do about the seizures. If you do have any more seizures, motor or otherwise, I want you to call my office right away, explain what is happening, and I will decide whether you need to come in to see me or whether it can wait. Understand?"

All three of them said that they did.

She didn't give them a prescription because her office just had plenty of prochlorperazine on hand, because there were plenty of nauseous people with cancer and because this was the kind of place people went to when they didn't want to be seen at a pharmacy. And so, one bag of prescription drugs richer, Light was blindfolded and disoriented and buckled back into the middle seat of the limo.

But this time L lingered during the buckling process, and when the door shut, L was still beside him, making sounds that sounded an awful lot like he was buckling himself in too.

"What do you think you're doing?" Watari demanded, voice tight, and Light was sort of wondering the same thing.

"I am putting on my seatbelt because I am going to be in a moving vehicle."

"You know that's not what I'm asking."

L refused to play along. "Then what are you asking?"

"Fine. Do what you'd like." There was a low humming that sounded like Watari rolling up that little tinted window between the front and back of the limo. What did he think L and Light were going to be doing? Perhaps more importantly, what did L think they were going to be doing? Light hated the idea of being blindfolded and unable to see L's expressions, unable to see what he expected of him, during potentially important conversation during this three hour car ride.

They had been sitting in stiff silence for a solid ten minutes when L reached his hand over and twined his fingers through Light's. Light held his hand back, but did not squeeze. "Good afternoon," he said, with just enough formality to be playful.

"Good afternoon," L murmured back, and he pillow'd his head on Light's shoulder, and after a moment of amazement, Light relaxed and leaned his cheek on the top of L's head.

"Your nightmares are getting better," L said.

Light hummed.

"Should I be glad?"

Light shrugged, gently. "It's not that they're better so much as that they're gone. It's because the memories are back. Kira doesn't dream."

This startled L and he was quiet for a little while. "The Death Note...?" he ventured, but Light shook his head.

"This isn't about the Death Note. It's about me. I had nightmares at first, of course, but I couldn't let that get in the way of my work. So soon enough they just went away."

"Just like that."

"I guess."

"Hm." L let go of Light's hand, and for one panicked moment, Light wondered whether he had scared L away with his casual talk of being Kira, and it was panic not on a strategic level but on a far deeper one. But L was not recoiling. He was using both of his hands to hold gently to Light's face, and to steady it for a kiss, then a second, and a third, and a fourth—

"Wait," Light murmured, because he didn't know when it was going to stop, and he didn't know whether he wanted it ever to stop, and everything was much more confusing than it should have been. "Wait, please. I'm just—I can't—"

And L said, "Okay," and his hands pulled away reluctantly and went back to hold both of Light's, which were cold and trembling. "Please just talk to me. Okay?"

But Light didn't know who L wanted to talk to. Was it a conversation with Light he was looking for, or with Kira? If Light, was it Light-before-Kira or Light-after-Kira? Worst of all, if L just wanted to talk to the real person whose hands he was holding and whose mouth he had been kissing, who was that real person at all?

"You're thinking very hard," L said. "I can see it in your mouth."

"What do you want from me?" Light asked, with daring honesty. "Why are you here? What are you doing?"

L sighed, and his warm breath told Light how close he was. "I've told you already, but you weren't listening. I want to know how you're doing. I want to be close to you. I want you to talk to me."

This was a crucial moment. Light had to decide whether it was plausible for Kira to let down his guard in the face of something that was either brutal honesty or blatant deception. If there was ever a time to do it, it was now. And if Light was to be successful in convincing L to become Kira for him, he would have to do it, and soon. Were there any downsides to giving in so easily? Light was having trouble thinking even of downsides that he could dismiss easily.

"You're thinking too hard again," L said.

"I know." Light bit at his lower lip, his mind stalled, his heart racing. L was wrong. The problem wasn't that he was thinking too much, but that he couldn't think at all.

"I'm going to try again, okay?"

Light either could not or could not want to reason his way into an answer. Instead, he leaned forward in the direction of L's voice, and L met him halfway.

They kissed, and kissed, and Light was grateful for the little tinted window that Watari had raised, and he longed for his hands to be free and for the seatbelts to be gone, and L was perfect in every way, and it was incredible that they had gone two weeks without touching one another. It wasn't long before the both of them realized that they couldn't go much further with Watari right in the front seat, even with the little tinted window there, and at about the same time they whispered this conclusion in each other's ears, and they sighed and kissed sporadically and clung and slowly eased away until they were comfortably settled against one another. Light had his eyes closed

behind the blindfold, and he pretended that it was nighttime and neither of them could see the other one.

"Your nightmares are getting worse," Light said, sadly.

L nodded. "I was being honest when I told you that it was incredible for you to be able to calm me down so quickly. Now my recovery time is longer, and I wake up in more of a panic. And I haven't chosen difficult enough cases to be able to convince myself to work on them instead of trying to sleep."

Light was shocked. "You're working on new cases?"

"Of course. I've told you already. The Kira case is over."

Like hell it was. "I suppose. That was just quicker than I had expected."

"The cases were piling up. I hadn't touched any cases as Deneuve in far too long. He's officially only the third best, but that doesn't mean that he can just disappear."

"Oh," Light said loftily, "*only* the third best."

Light could imagine L grinning, and he wished he could see it. "Yes, only the third best. Just petty assassinations."

"Only nationwide scandals."

Light laughed. "Mere politics." And L ducked his face into Light's neck and breathed deeply.

They snuggled—there was no dignified term for it, and Kira was just going to have to deal with it for the time being—in silence for a long while, and then L said, "Perhaps one day you could pick up Deneuve's cases. I've been getting tired of him anyhow."

"You want Kira to be a detective?"

"I want Yagami Light to be a detective. Besides, as long as you're working for me, how much trouble could you really get into?"

"It's true. You never cause any trouble."

L laughed, and snuggled closer.

"I'll have to have a life expectancy longer than a year before I go signing any contracts though. I wouldn't want to dupe you by making you pay me a year's worth of a work that I have no plans on finishing."

"Then I suppose an incredible salary will be your incentive for staying alive." Quietly, he added, speaking to real-world concerns, "Your family would be comfortable for years."

Light did not want to think of the real world or its endless concerns. "We'll see next week whether the partnership has any chance of coming through."

"I'll have to interview you first, of course. The position is very competitive."

"Who says I'll say yes? I've been sending out résumés. I'm very sought after, you know."

"I know."

And so they alternated between silence and banter and kisses. Light did not think about what he was doing, and Kira held his tongue, and L may or may not have known that there was a difference. Watari, for his part, remained completely silent, and he may or may not have been checking his rear view mirror over the course of the entire trip. Regardless, they soon wound up back at the prison that was their home, safe and sound. Light was disoriented, kissed, and led back to his cell, where his handcuffs and blindfold were removed, and everything changed yet again.

6. Chapter 6

It makes me so happy to hear from you guys! Thank you so much. :)

There was a question about how much we'll get to know about the physical side of L and Light's relationship, and for the most part that's being left as a secret between the two of them. ;) We can expect to get about the same amount of information in future chapters as in chapter 3.

Just as a heads up, next week's chapter is going to have a giant trigger warning on basically the whole entire thing, and for people who might be triggered by it and so would rather avoid it altogether, I'll put a little summary of the whole chapter at the bottom so you can read that instead. Take care of yourself, everyone!

I don't own Death Note, hymns, or lullabies.

Ryuk was cackling madly. "You told me you were popular with the girls, but I've never seen you act like this before! And with L! Hyuk hyuk hyuk!"

It was humiliating, to be sure, but Light would be the one laughing soon.

"It's almost a shame that I'm going to have to write your name in my Death Note now."

Light froze, and Ryuk dissolved into hacking giggles. Light pulled himself together, shaking, and coughed, hard. "Excuse me," he said, lifting his voice at the end just enough for Ryuk to know it was a question. He was going to have to be very careful, so that Ryuk would understand what he was trying to say without L guessing that there was a shinigami in the room.

"When I saw your lifespan, I thought something especially exciting was going to happen soon. But I followed you around today, and it turns out that you just have cancer. It was fun while it lasted, but you're really just a human at the end of it all. I'm not going to wait around for you to waste away and die. Might as well get it over with now."

Shit. Light had never imagined that Ryuk would give up on him like this. He had always seen himself as Ryuk's only form of entertainment, but maybe the five months apart had changed that. He could no longer rely on promising entertainment in the long term. He had to promise entertainment now, and a lot of it. But what influence could Light have on anything that could be remotely entertaining, from the confines of these walls?

L.

Ryuk had found it hilarious for Light to be romantically involved with L. The shock would wear off soon enough, but surely Ryuk would be entertained by Light's work to turn L into Kira. More than that, if Light was successful, Ryuk would be promised years of following around someone with Light's intellect but with a full lifespan. That was what Light would promise. But how could he propose the compromise to Ryuk without letting L in on his plan?

Misa.

Light laughed, as if he had just realized something, which he supposed he had, given the time crunch he was working on. Ryuk had threatened to kill him not thirty seconds ago, and already he was laughing.

"Glad you find your death so amusing," Ryuk said peevishly, confused.

L's voice came on over the mic, just like Light knew it would. L was under the impression that they were just as close as they had been in the car ride over. Less than five minutes ago, L had been unlocking Light's handcuffs and kissing his wrists, under the watchful eye of the barrel of Watari's gun. Now, there was a smile in L's voice as he asked, "Something funny, Light-kun?"

"I was remembering three conversations. First, there were two conversations that we had a few months ago, but only a few days apart. The first time was when we took a day off and were talking about whether I would get treatment for my cancer—"

"The temozolomide," L recalled.

Light laughed. "Exactly. And I might end up taking it anyways despite all my objections. But, anyways, you said that you almost wished I was Kira, because it would mean that I was just as brilliant as you."

Ryuk cackled. "He said that? You've really got him wrapped around your little finger, Light!"

"You are brilliant, and you are Kira, so I was right."

"Are you ever wrong?"

"Never. And what was the second conversation?"

"It was when I said you were starting to sound like Misa, and you said that Misa wasn't really such a fool after all."

"She's not," L affirmed. "She's been under surveillance since we released her, of course. She's been following the Yotsuba trials, and she seems to understand everything that's going on."

A thrill of excitement ran through Light's torso. Misa was still invested in Kira. As soon as he got the message through to her, she would be more than willing to help him. "The third conversation that I remembered also had to do with Misa, but this time it was between the two of you. You asked her how she would feel if I was Kira, and she said—"

"Awesome," L recalled, with a dark smile in his voice.

"Because she was pro-Kira."

"And because she was in love with you."

"I was mostly being a jerk when I suggested to Watari that I had more support in here than I thought, but maybe you're more pro-Kira than you realize."

"I'm certainly pro-Yagami-Light, but never pro-Kira."

And Light looked Ryuk right in the eyes and said, "We'll see about that."

"Hyuk hyuk hyuk!" Ryuk burst out, doubling over. "So, you want me to stick around to see this? And maybe I'll even get a new human to follow around after I kill you?" Light smiled, and Ryuk laughed uproariously. "And the best part is that he thinks you're in love with him!"

Light frowned, because he couldn't see any reason he couldn't both love L and want him to be Kira. After all, L loved Light and wanted him to be Kira, and L didn't even understand yet why Kira was righteous—or, rather, good.

Ryuk noticed the frown. "I've told you already that the price for using the Death Note is terror and torment, death at the hand of a shinigami, and not being able to go to either heaven or hell. And this is the gift you're giving your boyfriend! Hyuk hyuk! I really underestimated you, Light. I'll let you live for now. This should be fun."

It was only a small victory, and Light couldn't forget about the bigger picture. Light had convinced Ryuk to let him live, but Light hadn't even anticipated this being an issue, and he now still had to get Ryuk to contact Misa and go through a whole series of Death Note exchanges to get Light in a better strategic position. What was the one thing Ryuk wanted more than anything else? Apples? No, that was an addition, and the cravings that came with addiction only went so far. Besides, Ryuk had been abstaining for five months, and it wasn't as if Light had a consistent supply of apples anyways. But writing Light's name in his Death Note... Ryuk had been talking of nothing else since he had showed up. And he had said, nearly a year ago, that the Death Note was the bond between Light the human and Ryuk the shinigami.

Was.

Rem was being a pouting, disloyal shinigami, preferring to lurk around her Death Note in the basement rather than hover behind Light, but it was still

her Death Note that Light now owned. The only shinigami with the power to kill Light was Rem.

"Ha ha ha!" Light burst out, louder than he had intended, and Ryuk looked startled.

"You're in an interesting mood, Light-kun," L observed, now a bit suspiciously.

"I was thinking about Rem. That's my shinigami's name, you know." Light said this while looking at Ryuk, who didn't show any signs of understanding the deeper implications of this.

"They have names?"

"Why are you surprised?"

"Knowing someone's name gives you power over them. I don't mean just in the sense of the Death Note. The concept goes back as far as the book of Genesis. If these shinigami have names, I suppose they are not truly 'gods' of death at all."

Light thought of his self-proclaimed title as God of the New World, and how the public had been the one to name him Kira, and he wondered whether he needed to adjust his rhetorical strategies.

"Is it just the shinigami's name that you were laughing at?"

"Oh, no. I was laughing because it's her Death Note that I own, and yet you would never know it because she's nowhere in sight."

"She's in the basement most of the time," L said, and Light attention caught on the qualifier. "Where should she be?"

"You'd think she would visit me at least every once in a while. I mean, she's my shinigami." Light looked right at Ryuk again, and finally he looked displeased. "I guess I'm too boring for her to bother talking to me."

"You are unusually talkative today," L observed, now with some suspicion.

"You were the one who said you wanted to talk to me more."

"I suppose..."

"So, you have ownership of Rem's Note now, huh?" Ryuk was scowling as much as his distorted face would allow. "Guess that means I *can't* kill you after all, even if I wanted to. I've got to say, that kind of pisses me off."

"I wonder if Rem's trying to pawn me off to some other shinigami," Light laughed. "Maybe she'll try to trade me away to someone who's really bored, who won't mind how boring I am."

"Can shinigami do that? Trade humans with each other?"

"How should I know? I'm just guessing."

"You want me to give you my Death Note?" Ryuk hacked a scoff. "Not a chance, even if it did mean I could kill you. I only have one now, remember? You buried the other one in the forest so that Misa could find it later."

Light looked steadily into Ryuk's eyes until he understood.

"*Oh.* You want me to get Misa to dig up the second Death Note. Then I'll have one Note to keep for myself, and one to give to you. As long as she gives up ownership first, there's nothing stopping you from having ownership when I bring it here. And you could have ownership of two Notes at once if you wanted, but you'd better play fair and give up ownership of Rem's Note afterwards. You don't want to get on a shinigami's bad side."

Light was almost proud of Ryuk for being able to reason his way through what was being asked of him.

"But what are you going to do once you get the Note? You're under pretty tight surveillance here, and your boyfriend will definitely notice if you start writing names in the Note, not that you have any access to the names of criminals anyways."

And this was the grand finale. Light was going to have to speak in heavy metaphor, coating it thickly enough that L would think Light was talking to him, but lightly enough that Ryuk wouldn't get lost.

"Have you ever read the Old Testament?" Light asked.

"Not in the original Hebrew, unfortunately. But we can learn Hebrew if you want."

The idea of learning a new language with L was so *nice* that Light almost felt bad for deceiving him—almost. "That wasn't what I was thinking, but I don't see why not."

"What were you thinking?"

"I was wondering what your favorite part was."

"My favorite part?" L sounded astounded. "Hm. I haven't thought about it before. I suppose it would have to be the book of Job. That or the book of Daniel. And you?"

"Either the book of Ecclesiastes, or the prophet arc." And here Light met Ryuk's gaze, and Ryuk laughed and paid close attention.

"The prophet arc? That's awfully broad. There were quite a few prophets in the Old Testament, and even some in the New Testament."

"I'm specifically thinking of how the prophets responded to God being absent. It was the fault of the people, you know. They worshipped false idols. They said something was God when it wasn't. And their idols failed them, as false gods always do. And so God was absent for a time. And this was where the prophet came in. The prophet made a few judgments, to

prove that he was really sent from God, and then announced that God was going to be absent for a time, as punishment. The people would wallow in their evil, and then when God thought that they had learned their lesson, he would come back, though reappearing in a new form, and preaching news of a brand new world."

They were all silent for a moment, Light waiting, L reflecting, Ryuk thinking hard, trying to put the pieces together. Finally, L said, "*This* is your favorite part of the Old Testament?"

"Why not?"

"For one, it extends into the New Testament, so I don't know that you can necessarily call it a part of the Old Testament specifically. For another, I think you're misunderstanding how the prophet arc worked, period. For instance, you didn't even mention the major theme of faithfulness."

"I don't think I'm misunderstanding it, but please go ahead and look it up for me."

"Give me just a minute," L said, and the faint microphone static cut out.

"Let me see if I've got this right," Ryuk said. "You, Kira, are God. The people are the world. The prophet, I think, is Misa. The one who they said was God but who wasn't is that man who all the reporters are calling Kira." Dammit, the media really was sucking the lies right up. "And God appearing in a new form, I guess, is L."

Light had not intended for L to be part of the metaphor at all, but he supposed that it worked perfectly. He nodded, just once, giving a faint smile.

"Hyuk hyuk hyuk! Guess you've started rubbing off on me, Light. Can't say I would have expected myself to be able to figure it out like this. Can't believe I'm taking orders from a human either, but that's a whole other story. Now, let's see... You're going to be holed up in here until you can get L to take over for you. So you want me to give your Death Note to Misa, to hold

onto, but you don't want her to have ownership over it. You just want her to be the prophet, to make a few judgments, write in the names of a few criminals, to show that she really does have Kira's power. She's going to tell the world that Kira will be gone, as punishment, and that it's their fault, for believing this other guy really was Kira the whole time, but that Kira will be back one day, and he'll be the god of a brand new world. Hyuk hyuk! Damn, that's harsh. Did I miss anything?"

Ryuk had done brilliantly. Either five months in the shinigami realm had done wonders for Ryuk's intellect, or five months with virtually only L for company had turned Light into even more of a mastermind than usual.

"We both were right, but I was more right," L announced, returning from his research. "The prophets certainly preached doom, destruction, and punishment, but you can't just ignore books like Hosea, which are founded in the idea of God's faithfulness despite events like the exile. I don't mean to suggest that you cannot appreciate the prophet arc, as you call it, but you perhaps would be safer in sticking with the book of Ecclesiastes."

"At least I don't have to worry about accidentally extending your lifespan," Ryuk said, with a hacking laugh. "Usually helping a human this much would be considered against the rules. But you'll die of cancer no matter what I do. It's sort of freeing. Maybe more shinigami should give their Notes to humans who are already dying."

And L quoted, cheekily, "Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?"

Somberly, Light added, "There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say is meaningless."

And L sobered, and Ryuk cackled and dissolved into the prison walls, and L said, "Meaningless, meaningless. Utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless."

It was a few nights later that L woke up Light in the middle of a nightmare. It was a prochlorperazine-nightmare, filled with perfectly normal things like driving through an unfamiliar city in a car that only sometimes responded to the brakes, or like stumbling upon Sayu snorting a line off of her copied calculus homework, or like learning that L had been kidnapped by the Mafia after he had solved one too many of their crimes. Gone were the early-Kira-nightmares of blood and gore and endless screaming, and gone were the forgotten-Kira-nightmares of Ryuk and sprinting and laughter. But that didn't mean these ones were any less unpleasant.

"Light-kun," L was calling softly through the microphone.

"Shit," Light was mumbling blearily as he tore up out of his sheets, sitting up, fumbling at his mouth to make sure all of his teeth were still there instead of falling out into the sink.

"I'm sorry."

"No. It's just a prochlorperazine-nightmare."

"Falling?"

"Teeth."

"Yech."

Light smiled, despite himself, and his heartbeat began slowing. He swung his legs over the edge of the cot, stretched, and sighed. "I'm all ears. What's up? Nightmare?"

L sighed. "That's what woke me up first. I went to find Watari, thinking that perhaps sitting next to him would calm me down. I assumed he would be here, taking his turn keeping watch, but he wasn't. My first thought was that you had killed him somehow, of course"—Light winced—"but then I ventured out into the hallway and listened closely and heard the sobbing, and then I just thought that you had seriously maimed him."

"That isn't funny, you know," Light pointed out, because he didn't like the idea that his mere presence on this Earth made post-nightmare L even more terrified than he already was.

But L said, with some surprise, "I wasn't being facetious."

Light sighed. "Just keep going."

"As it turned out, Watari was not killed or maimed. In fact, he was kneeling in the kitchen doing something that looked very much like praying."

Light was uncomfortable, because the last time the topic of Watari and religion had come up, it had been because Watari had been threatening to kill him.

"Bear in mind that I have not seen Watari cry since—well. For a few years in my childhood, he would cry during dinner on the same day of every year. I thought he had lost a child or perhaps a wife, and on the fourth year I asked him about it. He laughed, wiped his eyes, and said that he had never had a child or a wife, and then he did not cry again. I think I know now what it was. Perhaps I'll tell you the story later. Regardless, this is not crying, but weeping."

"Is?"

"Mhm. I left after he sang a hymn a few times, and I assume that he's still at it, though I can't hear from here."

"He was weeping and singing a hymn?"

"Mhm."

"Which one?"

"Are you well versed in hymns?"

"No, but the words might give you a clue as to what's going on. Do you remember them?"

"Of course."

"Well, let's hear it then." Here Light's voice dipped towards teasing. "And you have to sing it, that is, if you can remember it."

"Light-kun," L said, voice lilting along. "I am the world's greatest detective. I think I can remember a few lines of a hymn."

"Oh, pardon me for ever doubting you."

"You are pardoned. Here is the chorus, in English, of course: 'I will arise and go to Jesus. He will embrace me in His arms. In the arms of my dear Savior, oh, there are ten thousand charms.'" L's singing voice was weak and only in tune enough to provide a very general gist of the melody. It felt like a secret, like a particularly poor drawing given by a child as a gift, and it made Light smile. "And here are the two verses: 'Come, ye sinners, poor and needy, weak and wounded, sick and sore. Jesus ready stands to save you, full of pity, love and power. Come, ye weary, heavy-laden, lost and ruined by the fall. If you tarry till you're better, you will never come at all.' Those are all the words. He sang it over and over again."

"Hm. Has he ever sung hymns before?"

"Plenty of times. But only when he was trying to teach me how to sing, which I was miserable at, or when he was trying to be subtle about squeezing theology into a conversation, which he was miserable at. He's never sung to himself like this."

"Hm. I don't really know what to tell you. It's strange, but it just sounds like religion, and religion is strange."

"I suppose."

"Keep an eye on it. Who knows? Maybe he has brain cancer too. Maybe in the frontal lobe, just like me."

"I am quite certain Watari doesn't have brain cancer."

"Maybe he should get scanned too, just in case."

"It's not brain cancer," L insisted. "Part of the reason it's so strange is that it seems so natural." He sighed. "I've never thought of Watari as having any genuine faith, but what if he does?"

"What if he does?"

"Yes."

"Does it matter?"

"Yes."

Light sighed, and lay back down in bed. L wasn't making any sense. It was the middle of the night, and he wasn't thinking straight, and his nightmare was fresh in his mind. He would be thinking more clearly in the morning. "Go back to sleep," Light said. "Just keep an eye on him tomorrow and I'm sure you'll figure it out then."

"You of all people know I can't go back to sleep now."

"Then come down here and sleep with me."

"Sleep with—?"

"I mean, literally. Fall asleep in the same bed as me."

L was silent.

"You know it would work."

"It would be a security risk, given that Watari is currently incapacitated."

"So now you're suddenly worried about security risks."

"Not for me. For the world. You're brilliant, Light-kun, and I want to keep you as far away from the world as possible."

Light thought of Ryuk leading Misa to the buried Death Note, and he did not know what to say.

"You could sing me a lullaby though."

"Like what?"

"What do you know?"

"My mother would sing a lullaby to Sayu almost every night."

"Did she sing it to you?"

"I don't remember. Probably not. I was never a very musical child."

"Let's hear it."

"ねんねんこりりよ おこりりよ. ぼうやはよい子だ ねんねしな."

And Light was almost as terrible a singer as L, but it did the trick, and by the third time through, the soft cloud of microphone static had cut off and L had fallen back asleep.

The next day L woke Light up in the middle of the night again, this time in the thick of a prochlorperazine-nightmare about being chased through the forest by werewolves. "Oof," Light grunted, falling out of bed, disoriented and pumped full of adrenaline.

"Oops," L said, whispering. "I'm sorry."

"It's alright," Light said, clumsily untangling himself from the sheets and climbing back into bed. "What's going on? Is Watari crying again?"

"Weeping," L corrected, because this was apparently an important distinction. "But, no, he isn't. He's sound asleep, which is why I wanted to talk to you now, while he can't hear me."

Light's heart leapt. "You're not planning on busting me out of here, are you?"

L was far more bewildered than he should have been. "Busting you out? Why would I ever do that?"

And with his voice far more disappointed than he should have let on, Light said, "Because you love me."

Speaking slowly, deep in confusion, L asked, "What does that have to do with busting you out?"

"If you loved me, you would do what was best for me."

"I *am*. Do you realize that up until today Watari has been endlessly trying to convince me to hand you over to the authorities to be executed?"

Light had guessed that Watari would be up to something like that, but he didn't realize it would be so frequent, obvious, or decisive. The cell's dim lighting was too dark, and Light wondered nervously whether Watari really was sleeping. His sense of self-preservation echoed, "Up until today?"

"Yes. This is why I wanted to talk to you. Watari has been acting very strangely all day long."

"I told you. Brain cancer in the frontal lobe. There's no other explanation."

"Please try to be serious, Light-kun. Watari has been acting *kind*."

Voice thick with sarcasm, Light intoned, "No."

"You didn't grow up with him. Watari is never kind. Loyal, responsible, conscientious, careful, forward-thinking, committed, yes. But not generous, not loving, not forgiving, not affectionate, not empathetic, not friendly. The only time I've seen him show any of those qualities was in his interactions with Roger."

"Roger?"

The microphone crackled dully. "Shit," L said miserably, and Light smirked, surprised. "I didn't mean to say that. Now I really can't bust you out. You would figure out how it was that I slipped, and then you would kill everyone I love."

"Hey," Light said, stinging, but also unwillingly intrigued by the idea of L having a weak spot. "I don't just randomly go around killing people. You of all people should understand that."

"Why me of all people?"

"Because you understand why it is that I'm doing this. All of my supporters understand too, but you understand even more than they do, because you're a hair away from being Kira yourself one day. You just don't want to admit it."

"I suppose your worldview requires you to be obscenely optimistic."

"On the contrary, I am realistic above all. There's no point in reaching for something that seems unattainable until you've already accomplished the attainable."

"And you're saying that my being Kira is attainable."

"You being a hair away from being Kira is attainable. The thing that seems unattainable is you actually being Kira."

"And why does that seem unattainable?"

"It would be too good to be true. You're not Kira yet, but I wish for your sake that you were."

L knew immediately what conversation Light was referencing, and he was reluctantly curious. "For my sake?"

It was the middle of the night, and Light had not been planning on making his appeal now, but he might not get another chance like this for a long

time. Gathering up every bit of love Light had for L, Kira made his appeal: "You are the single most exceptional person I have ever met. But this world isn't big enough for you. If you spend the rest of your life solving piddling mysteries, playing at changing the world, you're going to be bored to the point of drowning in emptiness by the time you're thirty. And sooner than either of us would like, I'm going to die, and then there won't be anyone around to keep you from being bored. And you can hope that perhaps someday there will be someone like us again, but you'll have to wait for a long time, and it might not ever happen in your lifetime. The only way you'll ever have anything close to a life will be if you spend your life making a new world. Don't you see what I'm doing? I'm not changing the world. I'm making a new one. And I'm not doing it for myself, but I won't pretend it isn't the first thing that's made me feel alive. When I die, I don't want you to die along with me. I want you to live, and to live abundantly. And I want the world to live, abundantly. But it's you who I love, and even if I wasn't dying, I would still want you to be Kira with me, so you could live abundantly. Do you understand? I love you."

The soft microphone static faded to a distant murmur in the darkness as Kira waited for L's answer.

And then L said, "Light-kun, today Watari told me for the first time that he loves me."

Light did not know how this could possibly be a relevant fact, but it set a heavy stone in the pit of his stomach.

"Light-kun, I—" Impossibly, L's voice broke, and Kira was afraid. The static cut off, and Light wished desperately to be able to see L's expression, to see what could possibly be going on in his mind, but he was utterly helpless. And L gathered himself together and continued, "Light-kun, I think it has to do with what happened last night."

Light was cold and stunned. "You mean, the crying?"

"The *weeping*, Light-kun."

Slowly, Light said, "I don't understand."

And L burst out, "*I don't understand either, Light-kun. That's why I'm telling you.*"

And Light tried desperately to imagine what it was that L did with his body when his voice leapt out like that. As for himself, he knew that he reacted powerfully and violently, throwing himself to the ground or across a table, pulling at his hair, shouting, swearing. But Light remembered how L had reacted after the first nightmare that Light had witnessed, his body collapsing into a single point, limbs coiling around his torso, every muscle crushing him further and further out of existence. Did his nails pierce his skin? Did his mind scream or go silent? Did his senses scald or deaden?

"Light-kun, Watari is the second person to tell me they love me."

Light was left with the terrifying realization that he had been the first person to tell L he was loved. He tried desperately to remember what the moment had been, but all he could think of was the most recent moment, when he had said it not out of genuine affection, but rather out of deep conviction. Kira spoke from conviction. Kira could not love—could not allow himself to love. Kira could not have nightmares. Kira could not die. But Light could love, and fear, and die. Unknown to him, L had been told that he was loved by three people, and only two of those people were telling the truth.

L's voice was very small, too small to be coming out of the three best detectives in the world. "Light-kun, why did he wait until *now*?" And he continued, using Light's name yet again, unintentionally making Kira shove his way even farther to the front, "Light-kun, I've never thought of Watari as having any genuine love, but what if he does?"

"What if he does?" Light echoed immediately, and he did not know why it sounded like he had already asked this question.

"Yes."

"Does it matter?"

"Yes."

All at once, Light remembered when he had first told L that he loved him. Light had muttered to himself, for the thousandth upon thousandth time, "I'm not Kira." He had been pouring himself a cup of coffee with one hand and straightening his tie with the other, a tie he had worn to hide the red mark L had made too high on his collarbone the previous night. The tension had been tight in his brows, and as he had spoken, they had flinched forward, creasing. L had made a small noise of surprise, and he had said, "I know." And Light had felt his brows relax, easing back into their proper position, and he had set the coffee pot down on the counter and had looked up at L, who had been thoughtful and suspicious and soft and leaning against the cupboards. And Light had said, "I love you," surprising himself, but apparently not L, who had said, once again, "I know."

But clearly L had not known, perhaps had not even believed, that Light loved him, just as he had not known or believed that Light was not Kira. And Light wondered whether either fact could ever be true.

"Do you believe that I love you?" Light asked. He had assumed that L believed it, that this was why he was so open with Light, so trusting of him, so eager to kiss him, so willing to sit by him getting sick in the middle of the night, so ready to pay for the millions of yen of medical treatment that would extend Light's life by a meager handful of months.

But L paused for a long time, and then finally said, "No."

"You don't?!" Light's voice leapt. It hurt more than he would have expected.
"Are you fucking kidding me?!"

"You're very surprised."

"Yeah, maybe because I've only told you that I love you like a billion times!"

"Did you honestly expect me to believe you?"

"Um, yes? Wait a second. Do you love *me*?"

"Of course."

"Look, if you don't actually love me, all you have to say—"

"Yagami Light, I love you forever and always."

"This is so unfair. Do you really expect me to believe that you love me when you refuse to believe that I love you?"

"At risk of being clichéd, life—"

"Don't say it! Look, it doesn't have to be that way. I'm making a new world, a world where things are *right*, where everything is fair and just—"

"And good?"

"Yes, and good!"

And, abruptly, L's voice went hard and serious. "Yagami Light, you need to realize right this moment that there is no such thing as a good person. If you make a new world with only good people, one day the only people left will be the two of us, and then you will realize that I am not good either, and you will kill me, and then you will realize last of all that you are not good, and you will realize that you've fucked up terribly, and then you will kill yourself."

"What makes you so certain that you are not good?" Light demanded, hot with anger. "Is it because you've broken some laws in the name of justice? Or because you insult people sometimes? Or do you have some dark past that you just won't tell me about?"

"What makes you think you have any right to hear about my past?"

Light had not been seriously suggesting that L had a dark past. Quietly, he asked, "Does this have to do with your trauma?" L did not reply, and Light's next realization came with a pang in his chest, "Does this have to do with your nightmares?"

"Oh, Yagami Light," L said, with a sad smile in his voice. "You always know what to say."

"Don't tell me this is about that man who was innocent but who got put on death row anyways."

"You're misremembering my trauma, Light-kun. I'm tempted to say that you weren't listening at all."

"Hey."

"Do you want me to tell you about my nightmares? Now, when Watari is asleep and will not hear me? Now, when I have told you that I don't believe myself loved by you or Watari or anyone else?"

Light fisted his hands and his nails bit into his palms and his heart pounded. "I wish you weren't alone up there. I wish we were together, so it would be easier for you to tell me what happened."

"On the contrary, if I were anything but alone, I could never say any of this. If you could see my face, if I could see your eyes—" L broke off, and Light could imagine him biting ferociously into the skin around his own thumb.

"Please," Light said, gently. "I won't even say anything afterwards if you don't want me to. Please, just tell me what happened."

L sighed, a long, dry breath that make Light wonder at his lung capacity, and Light imagined that his eyes were closed as he began speaking.

7. Chapter 7

You are all complete sweetie pies and I love you endlessly. C:

*Time for the trigger warning. Guys, big **trigger warning: suicide** here. Literally this whole chapter could be triggering. If you think you might be triggered but you still want to know what happens, please please please take care of yourself and only read the summary in italics at the bottom. I did my very best to be comprehensive without being triggering. Feedback on how well I did this would be wonderful.*

I don't own Death Note, Richard Corey, or Clair de Lune.

"This is how the dream goes. I am walking through the wrought iron gates of the crumbling English mansion in which I grew up, and it is raining. It is raining with thick brooding clouds that press into the ground and trap all the air under them, so that you have just enough space to breathe, but not enough to be wasteful with it. You feel every breath. By the end of the dream, I always wind up somewhere else, but this is where it starts.

"I know that Watari is waiting inside the mansion for me, because he is the one who invited me to visit, but I don't go in right away because I see the tree. There is a beautiful tree in the front yard, old and strong, with a thick and twisted trunk, with beautiful, full green leaves. It is the most beautiful thing in the yard, even though it is raining. There is laughter coming from the branches, and so I go towards the tree to see who is in it. It is A, and he is nine years, four months, and seventeen days old.

"I ask him how his studies are going, and he tells me all about them while he drapes himself over one of the branches and swings his limbs slowly back and forth. Everything is alright at first, but then things change. He tells me how he was assigned to memorize a poem for English class, and he asks whether I would like to hear it, and I tell him that of course I would. He recites this poem to me, in English, by Edwin Arlington Robinson:

"Whenever Richard Cory went down town,

"We people on the pavement looked at him:

"He was a gentleman from sole to crown,

"Clean favored, and imperially slim.

"And he was always quietly arrayed,

"And he was always human when he talked;

"But still he fluttered pulses when he said,

"'Good-morning,' and he glittered when he walked.

"And he was rich - yes, richer than a king -

"And admirably schooled in every grace:

"In fine, we thought that he was everything

"To make us wish that we were in his place.

"So on we worked, and waited for the light,

"And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;

"And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,

"Went home and put a bullet through his head.

"And A laughs so hard that he almost slips off of the branch, and suddenly I don't know whether he's laughing or crying, and then I realize that when I first heard him in the tree, he was definitely crying, but I don't know which one it is anymore. And I say to him, 'A, that is a very dark poem. Why did you choose that one?' And A replies, 'Roger said to pick one that *resonated* with us. He said he meant *resonate* in a figurative sense, not a literal sense. But this one *resonated* with me in a figurative sense and a literal sense. It shook me up real bad. I think it's because Richard Cory is me, and Richard

Cory is you.' And I frown and I say to him, 'A, you shouldn't think like that. Do you understand that this poem is about suicide?' And A frowns back at me, and says, just like the nine-year-old boy that he is, 'Duh.' And I say, 'You don't mean that you're suicidal, do you? Because if you are, you should talk to Roger about it.' And he blows a raspberry at me and says, 'Roger doesn't know anything. He told me that it was good for me to feel like that, just so long as I didn't actually *do* anything about it, because it was good for me to feel the pressure, but they couldn't have me actually *doing* anything.' And I say, 'Well, pressure is good, but being suicidal... I don't want you to think too much of Roger's opinion. Maybe we could talk to—' And A cuts me off, laughing and crying, really doing both this time, and he says, 'Oh, I *didn't*. I didn't listen to Roger at all. I *did* something about it.'

"And that's when I realize that something is wrong. Because the beautiful tree is heavy with rain and dripping big, fat drops of water, and my clothes are soaked and sticking to me uncomfortably, and my bangs are plastered to my forehead and getting into my eyes, and yet A is completely dry. And then I see that he's slipped from where he was draped over the tree branch, and that he's now hanging from the tree, not by his arms which are by his side, but by his neck, because he has in fact *hanged* himself from the tree, and not only that, but he's slit his wrists in long, careful lines, cutting open the veins lengthwise, and there's so much blood, covering his body and covering the ground, and none of it is touched by the rain. And I'm so *afraid*, and I turn to run and find help, but I slip in the mud and fall to the ground, hard, and that's when A starts talking again.

"And at first I'm relieved, because I think it means that he's still alive, but it doesn't. He says to me, 'You know, I did this because I wanted to be you. I didn't want to just be *like* you. I wanted to be you. B just wanted to be *like* you, but I wanted to *be* you. I *love* you.'

"And that's when I realize that A's blood is spilling towards me. I scramble to get out of the way, because it's moving far too quickly, but I twisted my ankle when I fell, and I fall right back down, and by then it's too late, because the blood is soaking up into my clothes, in with the rain, and it's streaming *up* them, speeding all the way up my head, covering my eyes and

making everything I see red, and I reach up to my face, trying to clear the blood away, and my hand skims past my right temple, where there is a hole. And without knowing what I'm doing, I reach into the hole, as far as my fingers can stretch, farther than the hole can withstand, and I scream and I scream and I scream, and then I catch it between my fingers and draw it out and it's the bullet that I've put into my head.

"And that's when I know that it's a dream. The things that are real are the mansion and the gates and the rain and the beautiful tree and A hanging and bleeding from its branches when I come to visit and the twisted ankle and the reason he is dead, but the bullet in my head is not real. So I struggle and struggle to get out of the dream, and I make it to being able feel my body around me, but it's a body that is lifeless and soft, one that I can feel like a useless prison around me, and I'm afraid so I automatically recoil away from it, making the same mistake again and again, because when I reject my useless body, I am flung back into the dream body that I hate even more.

"I am back in the rain, with the bullet hot and bloody in the palm of my hand, and B is there, and B is laughing. The tree is chopped down and grass is laid over it, so seamlessly that you can guess and guess but never be quite sure exactly where it was that A died. Younger kids say they know it, that they measured out the distance from the gate to the tree in their footsteps, but older kids have different measurements, so radically different that I wonder whether Roger made them say it, and so eventually the only thing the most superstitious kids can do is avoid the front yard altogether. But of course superstition makes a mockery out of any good detective, so B flagrantly walks through the front yard exactly as often as he walks through the back yard.

"But right now he's laughing, and his hands are red. All of the blood is gone, of course, except my own blood from the bullet in my hand, but the blood on B's hands isn't fresh anyways. It's deep under his skin—no, *in* his skin, like he tattooed it with thick lines into every crease and loop and whorl until the ink fell off the sheer sides of his hands. The image comes as a surprise every time, and for I second I forget that's all it is, an image, and I

wonder with fear how B could possibly have found a tattoo artist willing to inject blood into a nine-year-old's hands.

"B laughs while scowling, which reminds me that I need to be more concerned about him than an imaginary tattoo parlor. He laughs and scoffs and coughs at me—no, not at me, because he is not staring at me. He is staring at the space right above my head, and I tense, because when he stares off into space like that, it means he's going to say my name.

"He says it in as normal a speaking voice as you could imagine, as if we were in the middle of a casual conversation. I force myself not to show any emotion in my face, and I am focusing so much energy in that direction that I forget to control my hands. The hand holding the bullet flinches, and B sees it out of the corner of his eye and he laughs.

"'Don't like that?' he asks me. 'Don't like that? Don't like that?' And he says it over and over again until I finally tell him, as calmly as I can, 'No, B, I don't like that.' But he jumps on that and says, 'B? B? Are we at nicknames then? Huh, Lawli-pop? Lawli-pop? Lawli-pop? Lawli-pop? Lawli—' And I interrupt him and tell him, 'B isn't your nickname, and L isn't my nickname. Those are our names now. That's the name you put on all your assignments, isn't it? Isn't that what your friends call you? Isn't that what Roger calls you?'

"And B absolutely screams, '*FUCK ROGER.*'

"He turns around, curling in on himself, and I wait for him to calm down. When he faces me again, he is six years older. He is still curled in on himself, but now his hair is shaggy and greasy, and his eyes are blackened, some parts going purple and green as they heal. 'You're a fucking sell-out, you know,' he says, voice deeper and darker. 'If they would just give me the chance, I would be so much better than you. But they don't really care about me. You don't care about me. You all only care about yourselves.' And I start to tell him, uselessly, that we all care about him, but he says, 'I'm the best. But none of you want to admit it. Why won't you make me your

successor? Why don't you believe me when I say I'm the best?' And I tell him, 'I understand that you want to be my successor, but just because you want to be like me doesn't mean—'

"And he screams, '*FUCK A*. Did he tell you that? He was always going on about wanting to *be* you, not just *like* you. I don't want to be you. Why would I want to be you when I could be better than you? I *am* better than you. I'm already you and so much more. That's why you're all scared of me.'

"I tell him that we're not scared of him, and he staggers backwards and shakes his head. 'You're not? You're not scared of me? You're not?' And I tell him, 'No, I'm not.' And he screams at me, '*LIAR. BIG FAT LIAR. YOU'RE A LIAR. LIAR LIAR LIAR LIAR*

—' and he disappears behind the tree that is no longer there, and when he reappears, he is on fire, and now he is screaming, '*FEAR ME FEAR ME FEAR ME FEAR ME FEAR ME FEAR* —' and instead of running away, like I did when A was dead, I run towards B, and he runs towards me, and he engulfs me in the flames.

"But I pass right out the other side of the fire, and then I am in a prison cell, and it is cold and damp and dim. The bullet is still in my hand. Behind me, a piano is playing Debussy. I turn around, and I see B sitting at a grand piano. He isn't reading any music, because he cannot see. His posture is impeccable, his bare scalp is covered in scars, and his eyes are melted and shut. His fingers are ill-formed, and it looks painful to play with them. But he is a wonderful pianist. He hears my footsteps, and he shifts into improvisation, and, creakily, smiles.

"'What took you so long to visit?' he asks, voice rough and curved around the edges. 'Were you afraid?' I tell him no, that I've just been busy. He hums. I tell him that Roger sends his love. 'Do you send your love?' he asks me. I hesitate, and then I say, 'I suppose.' He tells me, 'I'm disappointed. Haven't you heard that it's better to be feared than loved?' And more quickly than I can even see properly, he grabs me, and I drop the bullet, and he stuffs me into the piano, slams the lid closed, and resumes playing.

"This is where I realize that it's just a dream again. Everything that has happened so far with B has been a jumble of memories, except that it wouldn't have been physically possible for B to stuff me into a piano alive, even a grand piano. I'm lying in the dream piano, and then I feel myself sink lower, through the strings, and back into my bed. But I don't realize it's my bed until it's too late. At first I just think that it's a deeper compartment of the dream piano, and I try to climb out, and it's only when I've fallen back onto the cell floor that I realize that I've trapped myself in the dream once again, for the final time, and for the worst time yet.

"Charles is sitting at a table, my bullet in his hands. He is sweating profusely, and the bullet is rolling in his palm, shining a dull red, stained with my blood and covered in his sweat. 'So, you're saying that if I don't confess, either they're going to kill me, or you're going to kill me.' And I say, surprised, 'I'm not going to kill you, Charles. Why would you say that?' And Charles says, 'Well, you killed A and B, didn't you? They told me. It's the only three person cell, you know. One bed and three people.' And I tell him, 'I didn't kill A or B. B isn't even dead yet. He hasn't even tried to kill himself yet.' Because A was first, and then Charles, and then B.

"But Charles doesn't care about chronology. He tells me, 'You *will* do it though. You're going to kill me. You're a detective. You kill me or you send me off to be killed.' And I say, 'I'm on your side, Charles. I want to prevent you from getting the death sentence. You just need to confess.' And he says, 'You mean, lie?' And I say, 'I mean, confess.' And he says, 'You're not always right, you know. B told me. He says he's right more than you are, and he says that I didn't do it.' And I tell him, 'B stuffed me in a piano. You shouldn't listen to him.' But as I say the words, I know they aren't true, because B did many things, but he did not stuff me in a piano. Why did I choose the one thing that wasn't true?

"Charles is back to talking now. He's saying, 'B told me all about the electric chair, just like you did. B also told me that you want me to get the electric chair, or you want to kill me yourself. But he says I shouldn't let you get your way. He says that A let you kill him, but that he didn't let you kill him. He knew you wanted to kill him, but he wanted to be the one to

kill himself, and he wanted to do it better than you would have done it. He almost got away with it too. He says that I need to finish what he started. He says that I need to be the one to do it, so that you don't get your way. We hate you, you know.'

"And I am surprised, and I say, 'Really?' And Charles sinks a bit and says, 'Sort of. A says he loves you, and B just says he doesn't love you, but I hate you, and I know that deep down A and B hate you too.' And I say, 'Why? I don't understand.' And Charles says, 'Because you killed us. And you don't even feel bad about it.' And I tell him, 'I don't want you all to die.' And he says, 'Yes, you did. You were in favor of the death penalty, weren't you?' And I say, 'Well, I was, but not anymore.' And he says, 'Does that matter? Can you go back in time and change how many criminals you have handed over to be put to death?' And I say, 'I've gone back in time now, haven't I?' And Charles sighs, and he says, 'No.' And with one violent gesture of his arm, he slams the bullet into his temple and falls forward onto the desk, and all the blood that should be coming out of him is rushing from my head.

"I try to stop the bleeding with my hands, plugging up the hole with one of my fingers, but it's coming faster than I can handle, and I can feel every beat of my heart in my fingertip. I whirl around, looking for someone to help me, and I see Watari, looking at me sadly through the prison bars with his hands in his suit pockets.

"I come right up to the bars and I say to him, 'Please, help me. Please. I've hurt myself. Please. Can you give me a bandage? I'll sit still. You can use the hydrogen peroxide and I won't move. Please, help me. I'll finish my homework and go right to bed. I promise. Please. Please, help me.'

"And he looks right at me, wearily, in his crisp three-piece suit, and he says, 'L, what have I taught you about justice?' And, slowly, I pull my hands away from my head, and let the blood stream out. And I stay standing and he stays watching me until the blood stops because it is all gone. And as I fall to the ground, I can hear Watari's footsteps as he walks away.

"And then I wake up. And the dream is over, but the worst part is that all of it is true. My life is a waking nightmare, because awake or asleep, I can never get away from the guilt of what I've done. And Watari knows everything that I've done. He's never gotten angry at me because of A or B, I think because he feels partially responsible for having put them there in the first place, but he got terribly angry at me because of Charles. He called me a murderer, you know. And that was before we found out that Charles had been innocent. Murderer doesn't even begin to cover it now.

"I know that a suicide can never completely be someone else's fault, but this time it was almost completely my fault. If I hadn't suspected Charles, the police would never have seriously considered him as the killer. If I hadn't pushed him to evade the death sentence, his innocence would have been found out while he was still on death row. If I hadn't tried to frighten him into confessing, he wouldn't have resorted to suicide. He was a perfectly stable young man. He had no history of depression, he wasn't on any medication with powerful side effects, and he was in a flourishing stage of his life. He had a wife and two children with a third on the way. And because I was stubborn, deceitful, manipulative, and relentless, I pushed him to suicide. I was responsible for the death of an innocent man.

"And he can't have been the only one. I've told you that I no longer believe in the death penalty, but there was a time when I was a great advocate of it. The more definite the sentence, the more I was protecting society. What better protection than complete elimination of the criminal? But even I am wrong sometimes. I haven't heard of any other times that it happened, not on my cases at least, but other judicial systems are wrong at sickening rates. And I contributed to it. And, more than that, if I am a murderer as well, don't I deserve the same fate I handed down to them? But I can't convince myself that I want to die. So I can only turn my back on the logic that a death deserves a death.

"And that's just Charles, not even A or B. My involvement certainly wasn't quite as obvious in A's suicide or B's suicide attempt, but you heard what they were saying. A wanted to be me, and that's why he killed himself. Is that illogical? It wasn't illogical to him, and he was brilliant, as brilliant as

we are. Was it too much pressure to be me? Did he think that I was suicidal as well? Was he trying to be Richard Corey? I don't know. All I know is that he died trying to be me, and if I hadn't been me, then he wouldn't be dead. And B wanted to be more than me, and that's why he killed himself. B too was brilliant, just like A and you and me. Was he trying to prove himself? Was he trying to make me afraid of him? Was he trying to make me afraid for him? I don't know. But he died trying to be more than me, and if I hadn't been me, then he wouldn't be dead. I know A and B weigh heavily on Watari's heart, and so at least I can share the guilt with him, but I can't share the guilt for Charles with anyone. I will never stop carrying this guilt.

"Yagami Light, please keep your promise to not say anything afterwards. Please. I don't want to hear your thoughts. I can assure you that I have thought them already. You said yourself that no one knew you better than me, and now I can say with certainty that no one knows me better than you. So, please, just go back to sleep. We can talk again in the morning. But not about this. Never about this. Will you promise me that?"

And Light took a deep breath, and said, "Please, let me say one thing."

And L was irritated and almost upset as he said, "Yagami Light, *please*—"

"You don't understand," Light interrupted. "This is something you have never thought before. You couldn't have thought it before, because I am one of the only people in the world who know this. I don't think it will change your mind on anything either. Please, just let me tell you. Afterwards, we don't ever have to talk about this again. I promise."

L sighed, and said, "Say what you like."

Kira was revolting in the pit of Light's stomach, tearing at the bars around him, spitting acid and throwing his claws, refusing to allow Light to spill these secrets, to compromise so much future strategy, but Light had Kira held back for now.

"When a shinigami kills a person by writing that person's name in their Death Note, the shinigami gets that person's remaining lifespan added to

their own lifespan. Because of this, they have eyes that can see the name and lifespan of a person just by looking at them. There is a deal that can be made with a shinigami called the eye deal. In exchange for half of a person's remaining lifespan, a shinigami will give that person the ability to see the names and lifespans of the people around them. If I gave Rem half of my lifespan in exchange for these eyes, this ability, then the next time I saw you, I would see your name and lifespan hovering in the space right above your head."

"The space—?" L was breathless with surprise.

"L, I don't know how, but I think that B had a shinigami's eyes. That's how he knew your name. He saw it floating above your head. And every time he saw a person, he knew their name and he knew when they would die. I assume that he wouldn't have been able to see his own lifespan, or the lifespan of any Death Note owner, but those would be the only limitations. I don't know if he made the trade or if he was just born like that, but I can only think that he had a shinigami's eyes. I don't know if that played any role in his suicide, but I had to tell you about his eyes, because I'm the only one who might ever tell you. That's all. I'll go to sleep now if you'd like."

L was silent for several long seconds, and then he said, "Yagami Light, you have given me an incredible amount of knowledge about the Kira case."

"I know."

"Yagami Light, why would you do such a thing?"

"Because I love you."

The microphone static cut out, and Light's cell was silent for the rest of the night.

The following is L's recurring nightmare. When he goes to visit Wammy's House (implied, but not mentioned by name), he talks with A, who reveals his suicidal thoughts, and suddenly L realizes that A has committed suicide

in front of him. After his death, A tells L that the cause of his suicide was that he wanted to be L, and that he loves L. L realizes that this is a dream and almost wakes up, but he is pulled into the dream again.

Back at Wammy's House, B laughs and mocks L. In the ensuing conversation, B becomes angry, and when he calms down, he has aged by six years and he is no longer L's successor. (It is suggested but not mentioned that this is about the time he left the orphanage, in canon.) B tells L that he is better than L, and he asks whether L is afraid of him. L tells him that he is not, and B accuses him of lying. He catches on fire (implied, but not mentioned, that this is his suicide attempt), and tells L to fear him. They are transported to a prison (implied, but not mentioned, that this is after B's suicide attempt and trial) where B is playing the piano. B asks if L took so long to visit him because he was afraid, and L says he was not. L says Roger sends his love, B asks whether L sends his love as well, and L is noncommittal. B says that it is better to be feared than loved. Again, L realizes that this is a dream, almost wakes up, and is pulled back into the dream.

Still in the prison, he is with Charles. L suspected Charles of murder, tried to get him to confess through fear, and Charles committed suicide. It was later revealed that Charles was innocent. In these dreams, Charles knows information about A and B that he could not possibly have known in real life. Charles accuses L of wanting to kill him and of killing A and B. Charles wants to kill himself so that L can't kill him. His motivation in the dream is spite, and he says that he, A, and B all hate L because he killed them without remorse. Charles condemns L for having supported the death penalty in the past, and L tries without success to separate himself from his past convictions. Abruptly, Charles kills himself.

L begins suffering the injury Charles dealt to himself, and as he looks around for help, he sees Watari through the prison bars. He pleads for help, childishly, but Watari simply replies, "L, what have I taught you about justice?" L gives up on his injury, and Watari watches as he dies. When L dies, he can hear Watari walking away. L finally wakes up.

Now L reflects on his dreams and their connection to real life. He feels guilty for the suicides, and he knows that Watari is aware of his involvement in the suicides. L recalls that, regarding Charles, Watari called L a murderer. L acknowledges that a suicide cannot have been his fault, but he concludes that he was the only driving force behind Charles' suicide. He reflects on the inaccuracy and injustice of the death penalty. He affirms that he does not want to die himself. He attributes A's suicide and B's suicide attempt in large part to himself, but he acknowledges Watari's involvement, and he is reassured that he does not have to carry their burden alone. But he feels that he must carry the guilt of Charles' suicide by himself.

L pleads that Light not say anything, saying that he has already thought everything Light is thinking, but Light pleads to say just one thing, saying that this is one thing L could not have already thought. L allows it. Fighting the part of him that is Kira, Light reveals a tremendous amount of information about shinigami, including the eye deal, and he proposes that B had a shinigami's eyes. L marvels that Light would reveal information that was so valuable to Kira, and he asks why Light would do such a thing. Light replies, "Because I love you," and the rest of their night is spent in silence.

8. Chapter 8

This will be the last update before Christmas, so merry Christmas to you all! Thank you all for sticking with me!

In case you're wondering how many chapters are left...I'm wondering that too! I expect there will be 3-5 more, but we'll see.

I don't own Death Note or Sherlock Holmes.

When Light went back to sleep that night, he had a prochlorperazine nightmare in which L was a dashing young gentleman who glittered when he walked, slept with Light occasionally, and killed himself while Light was busy cursing a loaf of bread. It was not only disturbing, but it utterly cheapened the depths of the story that L had confessed, and it made Light wake up feeling nauseous, despite the prochlorperazine he had taken before going to bed. So, he decided, perturbed and full of spite, that this damned prochlorperazine was useless, and he did not take it at breakfast. And, feeling no different but for his rising disgust with the pharmaceutical industry, he did not take it at lunch either. And so, by the time it was three o'clock, Light was kneeling in front of the toilet, shivering, alternating between vomiting violently and lying exhausted with his cheek against the cool porcelain. By four o'clock, he had shed his clothes and crawled into the shower, where he sat with his eyes closed and the hot water spray drumming into his back.

The whole time that Light had been getting sick, L had not spoken. Light had assumed that this was L's way of communicating, "You're a dumbass. Take your fucking medication when you're supposed to." But perhaps this was just Light projecting his own thoughts onto L's silence, because he had been in the shower for a half hour when he heard a noise at the cell door, not the sound of food being brought to him, but the sound of the door opening. Light listened closely, wondering if it was perhaps Watari coming to kill him, wondering whether he would decide to fight back if it were. But

the shower curtain drew back, and it was L, climbing in with all of his clothes on.

"Hello," Light said.

"Hello," L said, crouching at the front of the shower, where water began creeping into the bottoms of his jeans. He looked at Light, and if possible, his dark circles looked darker, and his hair looked not only messy, but tangled and unwashed. His fingers were bonier than Light remembered, and they twined together nervously. Light had been eating and sleeping so relatively well that he had forgotten that L wasn't necessarily on the same schedule. What had the oncologist said about L needing to take better care of himself?

"You're a bit overdressed," Light said. L gave a half shrug, allowing this.
"When was the last time you showered?"

L thought back, and said, "Three mornings ago."

Light said, "That's disgusting. I'm in prison and I'm dying of brain cancer and I still shower every single day."

Again, L gave a half shrug, this time with his mouth curling slightly up.

Seeing the almost smile, Light consulted with Kira, and concluded that it couldn't hurt, that in fact it would kill two birds with one stone, drawing L strategically closer while also conveniently indulging Light's own desires. "Well," he said, easing creakily out of his slumped position on the floor, "it's never too late for a shower." Holding out his hands, he tugged L closer towards the shower spray and helped him to undress, tossing his clothes out into the cell.

While Light washed L's hair, he noticed how much more the bones of his spine stuck out of his skin than the last time he had seen them, almost a month ago. Remembering, Light checked the back of L's neck to see if the bruises were still there. It looked like they were not, but Light couldn't be

sure. After he had rinsed out the shampoo, he kissed a careful half-circle around the back of L's neck, which L tolerated uneasily.

"I'm sorry," Light said. "I mean that, you know. I wish I could have thought of a better way to do it than the way I did. It was necessary and it was cruel."

"You said the Death Note was forcing your hand."

"I did say that."

"And you were lying."

"Well."

"It wasn't a very good lie. I saw your eyes while you were strangling me, and I saw your eyes afterwards, and they were the same. You may not have shinigami eyes, but you have Kira eyes."

"I was working under pressure. It was the best I could come up with at the time."

"You did brilliantly, of course. The whole you. You've never fought dirtier or better."

Light did not reply for a long moment, and then he drew away slightly, and said, "I feel sick. I think—"

L turned, looking far too concerned for Light's wellbeing considering what they had been discussing. "If you need to—"

"I don't know. I—" Looking at L was making him feel worse, because he was remembering how L looked almost a month ago, naked and dripping and bruised around the throat. Was this—? No, impossible. Kira didn't feel

And, incredibly, as if he knew, L softened, and said, "I don't think..." and leaned forward and—hugged him.

It was impossibly gentle, and somehow it felt like Light was being hugged for the first time. He shook and did not know how to hold L back.

"Fuck," he said, weakly. "I love you. Goddammit. I fucking love you, but I don't know how to."

And L said into the crook of his neck, "I don't know."

They spent a very long time in the shower together, and they emerged at around dinnertime, their fingers and toes soft and pruney. They dried off, put their old clothes next to the door, and dressed in Light's black cotton prison clothes. A little while after they were dressed, the food door opened, and two trays of dinner were slid through, identical but for the fact that there was a little cup with a prochlorperazine tablet in one of them. They sat on Light's cot, facing each other, and ate.

"You're getting too thin," Light said, as L picked at his food.

"I'm always thin."

"Not this thin. You're losing fat and muscle."

"A bit, perhaps."

"No, not a bit, a lot. I know what you looked like and felt like just a month ago, and it's not the same as now."

"I suppose."

"Is Watari feeding you properly?"

"Of course."

"Are you getting enough calories?"

"I'm eating fewer sweets, I suppose."

Light was horrified. "But what about your deductive reasoning?"

L shrugged. "My cases aren't hard."

"What about the Kira case?"

"The Kira case is over, Light-kun." He paused. "Unless there's something you aren't telling me."

"L, there are always things I'm not telling you, and there are always things you aren't telling me."

"I've kept Kira away from the world. You haven't spoken to anyone other than me, Watari, and the oncologist in a month."

Light said, "Hm," and he said too much.

"What have you done?"

"Are you genuinely expecting me to tell you?"

L frowned.

"If I just gave up on being Kira, I wouldn't be the person you love."

"If you think that, then you know nothing about the way that I love you."

"That may be."

L frowned deeper.

"Eat more sweets," Light said. "Because of the Kira case, and because of your health. And practice your capoeira."

"Because of the Kira case?"

"Probably not, but maybe. Mostly because of your health."

L was silent for a moment, and then he said, "How did you know about the capoeira?"

"I didn't recognize it until the first time I mentioned it to you. I researched her afterwards, and it wasn't until I had the memories and had seen you using it that I connected the dots."

"Why did you kill her?"

"She was about five minutes away from telling you that I was Kira."

L smiled, proudly.

"She was on the Beyond Birthday case with you. Beyond Birthday was B in your dream."

The smile dropped. "Yes." And then the fallen smile shifted into a frown that pulled at L's faint brows. "How did you kill her?"

"I don't think you need me to tell you that."

"Obviously you used the Death Note. But was it simply a heart attack?"

"Wouldn't that be in the police files?"

"Her body was never recovered."

Light recalled L's dreams, and flushed.

L started. "You're going red. What did you do to her?"

"It's not important."

"You didn't do something macabre, did you? I mean, you didn't cut her up into little pieces or blend her or eat her or anything?"

"Ew. No way. Why would you even think of that?"

"Light-kun, I investigate serial killers."

"I suppose."

"Well, what was it?"

"I don't want to tell you."

"Why?" And then L paused, and looked closely at the way Light was making sporadic eye contact, and he stiffened. "You didn't."

Light did not reply.

"You wrote in the Death Note for her to commit suicide."

Light was silent, and L stood swiftly from the bed.

With his back turned, L said, "You know, Watari didn't fight with me when I suggested going down to help you when you were throwing up. He usually would get very angry at any such suggestion, and I didn't imagine that he would ever agree that it would be a good idea. He said that he trusted me to make any decision I thought wise. I waited outside your door for ten minutes before coming in."

The words came out all on their own: "Do you still love me?"

L flinched. "Why would you ask me such a thing?" And, dressed in Light's prison clothes, he walked out.

Light stared at his cup of prochlorperazine for half an hour before taking it.

Three hours later, Light seized for the second time, and Kira seized for the first time.

He was lying in bed with his hands behind his head, wondering whether how far Misa and Ryuk had gotten with the whole Death Note plan, wondering whether Ryuk would stick around more than Rem had been, wondering how L would react when he saw it on the news, wondering whether the news would broadcast the situation properly, when he saw a crack in the ceiling that looked incredibly familiar. In fact, the sight of that

ceiling was so overwhelmingly familiar that he whispered in surprise, "Déjà vu"—or at least tried to whisper it, because when he tried to whisper he found that he could not figure out how to say the words. And then he realized that this was a seizure, and he tried to tell L, but again he could not. Finally, he managed a stream of sounds that sounded almost like Greek, like some parody of the opening lines of *The Odyssey*, but that were definitely not. He sat up, feeling disoriented, fixated on the crack in the ceiling that he felt convinced had been in every ceiling he had ever seen.

Surely L would have heard the noise he had made. Surely he would check in on him.

He reacted to the thought of the God of the New World wanting someone to check in on him, not with disgust or disdain as he would have expected, but with a deep fear. His heart began to race, and his head was a muddle of helplessness, and the seizure did not lift, and, again, he tried to call out for L and only succeeded in a faint cry. Still there was no response. He tried to count how long this seizure was lasting, because it was much longer than the other one, but he got lost in his own head and had to start over.

Finally, the speakers crackled and L sighed heavily into the microphone. Stiffly, he said, "Yagami Light, Watari has requested that I speak to you and find out whether you are alright, despite my insistence that you are a full grown human being who is fully capable of letting me know if you are not alright."

Light could not reply, and he began to sob.

"Light-kun." L sounded stunned. "What's going on? Are you in pain?"

Watari spoke from slightly farther away: "Yagami-kun, are you having a seizure? If you are not having a seizure, please point to the ceiling. If you are having a seizure, we understand that you may not be able to perform any motions at the moment."

Light did not reply, and he was reassured that at least he had answered the question properly this time, so he was less afraid, but the sobbing only

grew.

"L," Watari ordered, "stay by the monitors. I am going to check on Yagami-kun. I understand that you would want to come along, but we need someone by the monitors, and I am the one with the medical expertise."

L sounded too shaken to protest. "Okay," he said, weakly. "Light-kun, Watari is coming to help you."

Light could imagine few things worse, but he wasn't in any position to protest. Surely Watari wouldn't kill him with L watching, even if Light said or did something inflammatory and Watari lost his temper.

In less than a minute, Watari entered the prison cell, without his gun for perhaps the first time. Presumably he was more concerned by the possibility of Light grabbing the gun than by the possibility of Light attacking him physically. He had with him the first aid kit he had brought when L had cut his head open, but instead of pulling out some kind of seizure detector from the first aid kit, he simply sat on the cot next to Light, pulled a handkerchief out of his suit pocket, and began wiping Light's tears.

After a few minutes, the seizure started fading, as indicated by the fact that Light started focusing less on the familiar crack in the ceiling and more his status as God of the New World, and he jerked away from Watari's handkerchief. He still could not speak, but he knew that if he could speak, he would say, "Thank you, but that is *not* necessary. I am perfectly fine." After another minute, he could speak, and, slowly, with difficulty, he said, "Th-th-thank you, but I...*that* is not n...necessary. I—I am p-p-perfectly f-f-fine." It was less than convincing, which Watari did not comment on, and Light flushed, and after another two minutes, he was able to say, having run through the words over and over again in his head, "Thank you, but that is *not* necessary. I am perfectly fine."

"Very well," Watari said, once Light had proved himself able to speak again. He looked much less angry than he usually did, but it might have just been because he wasn't wielding a gun or threatening to send Light to his

execution. "Can you please tell me what happened before, during, and after your seizure?"

Light told him that he had been thinking about the Kira case, which Watari didn't even make a judgmental face at, and that he had had a sense of *déjà vu* because of the crack in the ceiling, which Watari could barely see even though it was still incredibly obvious to Light. It was difficult to describe what it had felt like to not be able to talk, not because it was physically difficult to speak, but because when the description came out of his mouth, the experience sounded not nearly frightening enough to bother crying about.

But as Light struggled to make the severity of the incapacitation clear, Watari simply nodded and said, "Seizures get the best of even the best of us. You have nothing to be ashamed of."

Light felt his face warming even as he said, "I'm not ashamed."

But Watari gave him the benefit of the doubt, as L would never have done, and he said, "I'm glad to hear that." And then, impossibly, Watari set a gentle hand on Light's shoulder. "I will contact your oncologist, and I will let you know when she would like to see you. You already have an appointment scheduled for two days from now, so I would imagine that she would want us to go ahead and keep that time, but I will let you know if the appointment is moved up. Is there anything I can get for you to make you more comfortable? Perhaps a light snack or some tea?"

This had to be a ploy. By now Light was thinking clearly enough to know that something was wrong here, but not clearly enough to figure out what it was. Cautiously, Light said, "No, thank you. Especially with my nausea earlier today, I don't want to eat before bed."

"That is very fair. If there is anything I can get for you, just speak up, and either L or I will bring it for you or get it done for you."

Suspiciously, Light said, "Thank you."

"You're welcome. Yagami-kun, there is something that I have been wanting to tell you today. Would it be alright if I told you now?"

Here it was. This was going to be the threat or the warning or the trap. "I suppose."

"I know that you probably do not care very much for my opinion, and I know that we disagree on several issues, but I wanted to let you know that I no longer wish you any ill. I admit that until recently I was angry with you and I wanted you to suffer for your actions. I sincerely apologize for my words, my actions, and my attitude towards you. I am in no place to judge you, and I wish you the very best in all facets of your health. I retain my convictions that your actions as Kira have been wrong, but I forgive you, and I no longer hold your actions as Kira against you. I will not stand in the way of your relationship with L, and I will embrace your presence here as long as you and L wish it. I hope that you can one day forgive me for the way I have treated you, because I sincerely would like to have a harmonious relationship with you. Please do not hesitate to ask me for anything. As much as I am here to assist L, I am here to assist you."

Light had been waiting this whole time for the catch to come, but Watari had finished his speech seemingly without ever getting to the catch. Had Light just missed it? Did he dare ask straight out whether he had missed the catch?

"I see that you are having difficulty believing me," Watari said, "and I understand. I do not expect an answer. I simply wanted to let you know, so that we can begin to repair our relationship. Again, if you need anything, just let me know. I hope you have a peaceful rest of your night."

Watari picked up his first aid kit and gave a little bow before leaving.

After Watari had left, but before he had returned to the monitors, L said, "Holy hell."

Light looked down at where Watari had left his handkerchief on the cot in a neatly folded square. "That was really fucking weird."

For the third night in a row, L woke Light up in the middle of a nightmare. "I'm still upset with you," L said, as Light groaned and rolled out of bed, chased by the quickly fading memories of a nightmare tsunami, "but this is important. I think you were right about Watari having brain cancer. I need you to help me convince your oncologist to make him get scanned when we go to your appointment in two days."

"I was mostly kidding," Light said groggily, crawling back into bed and hugging a pillow to his chest. "I don't actually think he has brain cancer. It's possible, I suppose, but that would be too much of a coincidence for the both of us to have the same kind of brain cancer at the same time."

"There's no other explanation. When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

Light digested for a moment, and then said, "Are you quoting Sherlock Holmes at me?"

"Light-kun, you saw him this afternoon. Was that the Watari you know? Can you even begin to imagine how unlike it was from the Watari I know?"

"Are you sure you've exhausted all the other possible explanations? Brain cancer seems like quite a leap."

"What else could it be?"

"Maybe it's a trick. Maybe he's trying to get on my good side so he can sneak up on me and kill me the second you're not looking."

"That would be possible, if not for what just happened."

L's voice tremored, and Light sighed. "Is this going to be another long story? Not that I didn't very much appreciate hearing about your nightmares, but I don't want you to emotionally exhaust yourself. Maybe you should gain a little weight first."

"No, it won't be long. I simply asked Watari for forgiveness, after hearing that he had inexplicably forgiven you, and he told me not only that he forgave me, but that he had never held me responsible for A's or B's deaths."

Light was more astounded by L's actions than Watari's. "You asked for forgiveness? You?"

"What?"

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why do you care about forgiveness?"

"How could I not care about forgiveness?" And then L paused. "Do you not care about forgiveness?"

"Why would I care about forgiveness?"

They marveled in silence at one another.

Finally, L ventured, "Do you genuinely believe that you have never done anything wrong?"

"Morally wrong, you mean?"

"Yes."

"No."

"No, you don't believe that?"

"Yes, I do believe that."

There was a shorter silence, and then L asked, "You've never lied?"

"I don't believe that it is wrong to lie so long as it is for a greater good."

"You've never teased anyone?"

"No more than they would understand as light-hearted."

"What about when you strangled me?"

Light caught his bottom lip between his teeth, because that was the one action in his life that he—well, he didn't *regret* it, but, perhaps—well, he doubted it, certainly.

"You told me you were sorry."

"I did say that."

"Did you mean it?"

"Yes."

"But you don't think it was wrong."

"It perhaps wasn't the best, but it was *for* the best."

"What about when you pushed me out of bed? You said you were sorry for that."

"I was sorry. But I also did it because I wanted you to be alright. I wasn't trying to hurt you."

"Light-kun, do you think that good intentions justify bad behavior?"

"Good intentions create good behavior, and bad intentions create bad behavior."

"Do you genuinely believe that?"

"Of course."

"So, when I killed Charles, it was alright because I was striving for justice?"

"I—" How could Light reply to this? If he wanted L to be Kira one day, he couldn't imply that L was unfit to take his place as the God of the New World.

"When a parent abuses their child, is it alright because they have told themselves that they are providing discipline? When a robber steals the money out of a cash register, is it alright because they are trying to provide for their family? When a man rapes his wife, is it alright because he is expressing his love however he sees fit?"

"That's different."

"How?"

"Because those people are *wrong*."

"Why are they wrong?"

"Because they're idiots."

The room was filled with stunned silence.

"Look, L—"

"You don't genuinely believe that, do you?"

"Believe what?"

"That you're better than everyone else because you're smarter than them?"

"Don't you believe that?"

"Of course not."

Somehow, Light had miscalculated terribly. For the first time, he doubted whether it would ever be possible for L to become Kira.

"Light-kun, anyone can excuse any actions given the opportunity. There is no action that cannot be justified in some way. But an excuse and a justification do not mitigate the hurt that actions cause to real human beings. You do not accept the excuses or justifications of anyone other than yourself, and that is where your true hypocrisy lies. Your intellect does not set you apart from those around you. You are not a god. You have done terrible things, more terrible things than you perhaps could bear to realize, and you need to be forgiven. It is extraordinary that Watari could forgive you. I do not know if I quite yet can."

The microphone cut off.

Light was still, L's words seeming to have hit some sort of barrier between his ears and his heart, sliding slowly to the ground before they could absorb in any sort of meaningful way. For the most part, Light was bemused, impatient, and not terribly concerned by anything L had said. But there was also a part of him that wondered what would happen if the barrier came down, if he allowed himself to seriously consider the possibility that he was

Impossible. He was the God of the New World. He wasn't w—

"Yagami-kun."

It was Watari.

"Your appointment has been moved up to tomorrow. We will leave after breakfast. Try to get some sleep. L will do the same."

On the way to the oncologist, Light was not kissed on the wrists, forehead, or mouth, and Watari was the one to buckle him into his seat in the limo, and L presumably sat in the front passenger seat—presumably because he did not say a word the whole way there.

The oncologist had her arms crossed over her chest. "Something has changed again. Please tell me that the thing that has changed is that you no longer want treatment."

"No, that's not it," Light said, but slowly, without conviction.

"You're just indecisive, is that it?"

Light hesitated, very aware of L and Watari flanking him on either side like bodyguards, and nodded. She was very sharp. With L tipping precariously away from ever agreeing to be Kira, he was having trouble deciding whether it would be more persuasive to lobby Kira's side from a radiated, hairless perspective, or a seizing, beautiful perspective. Neither perspective sounded particularly appealing, and neither perspective sounded particularly convincing. But one of them had to be at least slightly better than the other.

"Then perhaps it will be reassuring to hear that you no longer have reason to be indecisive. I have decided that any treatment that we pursue will not involve either surgery or chemotherapy."

In the corner of his eye, Light could see L flinch. "Well," Light said, trying to process, but not feeling any different after hearing the news, "I guess I get to keep my hair."

"Shut up," L snapped.

"Excuse you," Watari said warningly.

"Fuck your hair," L said, coldly, viciously.

"Stop this." Incredibly, Watari had reached over and grabbed L firmly by the elbow. "And apologize this instant for your language."

L shook his arm free. "Fuck you." And now speaking to the oncologist, he said, "What the hell do you mean you won't treat him?"

The oncologist was utterly unshaken. "I will treat him, but my treatment plan will not involve surgery or chemotherapy. And neither will anyone else's treatment plan, unless they are promising to return him to you as a vegetable."

"There has to be something you can do. Look at him." L stabbed a finger in Light's direction. "He's perfectly alright. He's walking and talking and being an asshole, just like always."

"He is not perfectly alright, and you know it. You have been giving him the prochlorperazine, haven't you? Think of when he refused to take it. I know there must have been at least one time recently. Look at those burst blood vessels under his eyes. That's from the vomiting. If you weren't doping him up every six hours, that's what he would be doing after almost every meal. Do you know why he's so nauseous all the time? It's because the tumor is taking up too much space, and his brain can't handle the pressure. Couldn't I just take some of the tumor out? Sure, if you want me to cut through the part of the brain that contains his personality. Then couldn't I just radiate it out, even if just to buy him more time? If he had been in here six months ago, maybe. Even at three months ago it would have been a race against the clock. But now? Absolutely not. Any radiation now would only worsen his quality of life without giving him any longer to live."

"How long?" Light's voice peeked out into the conversation, more weakly than he had wanted it to. He cleared his throat. "How much longer do I have?"

She softened. "No one can tell you exactly, and anyone who claims to be able to tell you will be lying. But I would predict one to two more good months, with infrequent seizures, and then another one to three bad months, with frequent seizures and increasing discomfort, and then no more than one very bad month, in which you will want to find somewhere safe and comfortable to stay."

"So, three to six months."

"Yes."

Light sighed, relieved. Three to six months to convince L to become Kira. It could be tight, but it would be possible. He had been worried that he would only have a month left. Six months was almost too much time at this point. Enough time for L to become Kira and then change his mind and then only perhaps change his mind back again.

L heard the sigh and whirled around to face Light. "Is this good news?" he murmured. His eyes were hard and angry. "Are you pleased that you have no more than half a year left with me?"

"Six months isn't bad. A lot can happen in six months." Light said it as a promise, and L frowned.

"This is what I wanted to discuss with you," the oncologist interjected. "Your seizures are very minor at this point. All medication could do is decrease the frequency of the seizures and perhaps delay the more serious ones, but at the cost of a whole host of possible side effects. To be perfectly honest, this kind of medication is not even very effective in the first place at treating cancer-related seizures compared to a placebo. I know you'll discover all these things the moment you begin to research them, so I'm sparing you the trouble. My suggestion is that you wait to begin taking the medication until either you seize more than once in a seven day period, or you have a motor seizure. This will give you greater freedom to accomplish whatever you are permitted to accomplish for the next few weeks, uninterrupted by any additional side effects. On this issue my recommendation is strong, but I am still willing to prescribe you medication now if you wish. Do you have an opinion on the issue now, or would you like some time to think about it?"

"I think—" Light began, but L would not let him finish.

"He should have the medication now. He shouldn't have to go through these seizures any longer than he has to. And don't some medications have possible reductive effects on tumors?"

"Not alone they don't, which is how this medication would be taken. And I assure you that the seizures are much less worse than they may seem."

"You don't know. You didn't see him."

"I've seen hundreds of patients with seizures, and, depending on the severity, the side effects and the seizures can be comparable. In this case, the seizures are not severe enough to risk the side effects. No matter how severe the seizure may have looked, it was only a simple partial seizure, and you are not the person who will need to deal with the side effects."

"Of course I am."

Firmly, with her voice raised just so, she said, "No, you are not."

In the ensuing silence, Light saw a flicker in L's eyes that gave him a cold sort of hope.

"This is perhaps a bit of a non sequitur," Light said, "but would it be possible for him"—he nodded at Watari—"to get a CT scan?"

Understandably, Watari was absolutely incredulous. "*Me?*"

"I got a scan when I didn't need to, and that's how they found out about the brain cancer. With all my appointments, we might as well check your brain too."

"This is completely unnecessary," Watari blustered, but then he realized how L was staring silently at the ground, and he straightened, and said, "I see. Did you put him up to this?"

L just said, "It can't hurt."

"Yes, it can."

"Well, it would be fair at least."

Watari looked like he was going to explode into a rant about pulling the fairness card, but then he took three deep breaths, kneaded at his brow, and sighed. "Alright. Can we do this right now?"

"Give me ten minutes," the oncologist said, "and I will come back to get you."

They waited in perfect silence for those perfect ten minutes, and then once Watari had left the room, Light said, "What are you doing?"

L scowled at him. "What are *you* doing?"

"I thought you were mad at me."

"I *am* mad at you. You don't regret strangling me."

It was certainly fair of him. "Then why are you acting like this?"

"Acting like what? Mad at you?"

"No, *not* mad at me."

"How am I acting not mad at you?"

"You're being all...protective. And concerned. And empathetic."

"So?"

"*So?*"

"Yes, so." And then L frowned. "I'm not going to say it over and over again just so that your ego can feel puffed up."

"Say what over and over again?"

"You know."

"No, I actually don't."

L sighed. "What you asked me yesterday right before I left."

Light thought back, taking so long that L started getting visibly impatient, and then he ventured, "You mean, whether you love me?"

"Yes."

Light gaped. "Okay, you have literally told me that you loved me like three times, and every single time it was in the middle of some convoluted sentence."

"I'm sure I've told you more often than that."

"No, you actually haven't. And you haven't said it even once all by itself."

"I'm sure I have."

"Prove it. Do it right now."

L hesitated, glaring, and then said, "I love you."

"I love you."

L's mouth flattened into a hard line.

"What?"

"I don't believe you."

"How can I make you believe me?"

"Show me."

"I—" Light swallowed. "I don't know how."

"Then I suppose we are at an impasse."

Light sighed. "Fine. I don't believe you either, just so you know."

L's eyes flashed. "What do you mean?"

"You can't say you love me and be mad at me at the same time."

L looked away and shook his head. "You really are a child."

"Hey!"

"I'm mad at you right now, which means that I don't want to kiss you right now, but I also love you, which means that I don't want you to die, and I know that I'll want to kiss you sometime in the future once I stop being mad at you."

Light was silent, processing.

L's brow creased, and then he softened, and took a half step closer. "Have you ever genuinely loved anyone in your life?"

Watari returned, and L retreated.

There was no brain cancer. Not even a sign of Alzheimer's. Watari was obscenely healthy for his age. L and Light were back to the drawing board for an explanation for his behavior.

Light chose not to take the medication for his seizures, because Ryuk still hadn't shown up with the other Death Note, and he couldn't afford to be foggy or itchy or swollen when he had the fate of the world in his hands. Hopefully he just wouldn't have a seizure in front of Ryuk, because Ryuk might never take him quite as seriously ever again.

L did not join him in the backseat on the way back, presumably because he was still angry at Light. But they didn't put up the little tinted window, so at least L hadn't gotten any angrier.

But then, about halfway through the ride, Watari quite abruptly muttered, "Dear God," and the limo began slowing to a stop. Light couldn't see anything through the opaque windows in the backseat, but he could see Watari reaching over and pointing out through the front passenger window,

and L murmuring something in reply. Then the little tinted window rolled up, and Light was left completely alone for the rest of the ride.

9. Chapter 9

Wishing you all an early happy new year! I hope your holiday season is going well.

There was a question about whether to expect a happy ending or a sad ending, and although it isn't written yet, I'm expecting somewhere in between. Thank you all by the way for your detailed reviews! It fills my chest with all sorts of writerly butterflies to hear you speculating and opining and wondering about things. C:

There is an itsy bitsy possible tw: suicide about 3/4 of the way through, so a quick heads up for that.

I don't own Death Note.

These midnight encounters were becoming a regularly scheduled time for saying what could not be said in front of Watari. At first, Light had hoped that L was planning on telling him what Watari had been pointing at in the limo, but he was in for something far more incredible.

"Yagami Light," L was saying, voice tighter than usual, "are you fully awake? You're going to want to have all your concentration for this."

Light had just been woken up from the beginnings of a nightmare about being in a plane crash, so he was still a bit fuzzy, but he just said, "Go ahead. I'm ready."

"I have a bet for you."

This sounded a bit underwhelming. "Uh, okay. What's the bet?"

"I propose that you give up your memories of being Kira."

Light laughed, despite himself. "Do you really?"

"Yes."

"And why on earth would I do that?"

"Because if you still want to be Kira after giving up your memories, then I promise to join you as Kira immediately, and I promise to take over as Kira once you die."

Light was no longer fuzzy.

"I'll even give up half of my lifespan in exchange for the shinigami eyes if that suits you. But if you no longer want to be Kira after giving up your memories, then you will permanently discard your memories, I will destroy the Death Note in our possession, and you will join me in tracking down and destroying any remaining Death Notes."

There was a long silence, and then Light said, "You're shitting me."

"I assure you that I am not."

Light hadn't even had the chance to become radiated and hairless or seizing and beautiful. He had never imagined that L would agree to be Kira without being fully convinced of the justice of it all. "So," Light said slowly, "you are betting that I will not want to be Kira without my memories, and I am betting that I will, and what is on the line is being Kira."

"Double or nothing."

What were the downsides of accepting such a bet? Certainly a lot was on the line, but a lot was always on the line. At least things would be decided once and for all. If Light won the bet, Kira's line would be continued through the best possible mind, and Light would even have up to six full months to train L in his footsteps.

The biggest problem was that Light knew that he could act like a lovestruck moron without the memories. But that was just because he was confused. Without the memories, he hadn't considered Kira's side of the story fully, so

he didn't understand. But he could understand, if he tried hard enough.
"Could I write myself a letter so that Kira could make his appeal?"

"Of course. It would only be fair."

What were the other downsides? Perhaps L would feel coerced into being Kira, and so would not perform at his best. Perhaps he would make mistakes, driven by his subconscious reluctance, that would compromise the legitimacy of Kira's reign. Perhaps he would even go back on his promise, and go rogue.

No, L would not do that. He was loyal to a fault, when he invested his loyalty, and he would sooner die than betray such a promise to the one person he loved the most.

"I don't want you to take the shinigami eyes," Light said, without quite realizing it.

L was clearly surprised. "You don't?" He hummed. "I had thought for sure that that would be a selling point."

Light shook his head. "If you're going to be Kira, we can't have you dying twice as early as you are supposed to. We need you alive and well."

L reflected on this for several staticky moments, and then he said, slowly, "I understand. Yes, that makes sense."

"If anyone needs the shinigami eyes at any point, I'll take them. What's the difference between three months and six months at this point?"

"Hey." L's voice was sharp. "It makes a difference to me."

Impossible. Even in the midst of such a conversation, L's love still shone through, bright and clear, for Light, independent of Kira altogether.

"Does this mean you accept the bet?"

Light would need to write himself a letter first, and he would need to wait for Ryuk to get back, to make sure that the plan had been executed properly, but he didn't see any reason that this couldn't work.

His heart picked up. It was happening. L was going to be Kira with him. Finally, they were going to be truly together, united in glorious purpose, reigning as one unit, living as one flesh. He ached unexpectedly at the thought.

"I will," Light choked out. "Not right now. I need some time first. But I will. I swear I will. *God, L*—"

"*Hyuk hyuk hyuk.*"

Speak of the devil.

"I should've known that the second I got back, you would change the plan on me again. Do you even want this still?" Ryuk shifted from out of the shadows, looking as horrifying as ever, and holding out a Death Note. It took everything Light had in him not to take it immediately, but as long as Ryuk was holding the Death Note, L couldn't see it. Everything was coming together just as it was supposed to, just as it inevitably always would. Kira was justice, and justice would always prevail.

"I don't know if you've seen the news, but Misa did exactly what you told me to tell her to do. I came back to find you right after they announced it. Everyone is completely losing it. They're showing it on all the public news screens."

Could this have been what L and Watari had seen out the limo window? Was this why L was making this bet? What could the broadcasts have possibly said to change his mind?

"I wish you could see it, Light. When is L going to let you out? Once you do this bet with him? Is he really going to be Kira with you?"

L would explain this to him afterwards. All that mattered now was that the second Death Note was here, and Kira was ready to be resurrected. Now all that was missing was the second Kira—not Misa, but the *true* Second Kira. Kira Redux.

"Will you give me paper and a pen?" Light asked. "Good paper, and a good pen?" When was the last time he had really written, filling a creamy, smooth leaf with crisp, wet strokes of kanji? He shivered. L would know this joy soon. L would be Kira, and he would understand.

L was surprised, but he said, "Certainly. Would you like to begin the letter now? I thought you had wanted some time to think."

"I just need time for the letter. That's all the time I need. Then we can call Rem to my cell, and we can begin."

Light's life was ending, but Kira's had just begun.

They had to wait until the next night to officially make the bet, because they were doing this behind Watari's back. Light didn't know what would happen to Watari when L became Kira. Surely Watari would not allow it, so either he would have to be removed, or they would have to remove themselves from him. Watari would think Light had coerced L into doing it. He would never believe that L would be Kira of his own volition. They would probably have to kill him. Hopefully L knew Watari's true name, and hopefully it wouldn't be long before his convictions as Kira outweighed his childish attachments.

Light faked sleep for two hours, not wanting to be foggy from a nightmare, and then L's voice came over the intercom, saying, "He's asleep."

Light stood smoothly, immediately alert. "You're sure?"

"I still had some sleep aids from years ago, and I poured a whole bottle in his coffee pot a couple hours ago."

Light's eyebrows rose. "A whole bottle? Wouldn't he have tasted it?"

"Of course. But he also would have swallowed one mouthful and one little sip before pouring the whole pot out. But that mouthful and sip should be enough to make him sleep more soundly than usual, which is all we need."

"Hm." Maybe L's loyalty to Watari was already thinning.

"Are you ready?"

"Yes. I need you to go downstairs and bring Rem and her Death Note back. You can hold onto the Death Note, and you can send Rem into my room. I'll tell her that I want to give up my memories, but that I want her to stick around for when I want to be Kira again. Then I'll give up my memories, read my letter to myself, and decide to keep the memories. You'll bring the Death Note to me, and I'll have my memories back, and we'll be Kira together."

"Hyuk hyuk hyuk."

Ryuk, of course, was still around, and he would give his extra Death Note to Light. When Light gave up possession of his memories and his Death Note, ownership of Rem's Death Note would go to L, as long as he was touching it. Ryuk would be able to write Light's name in his Death Note at the end of his life, and Rem would be able to write L's name in her Death Note at the end of his life. No. After Light died, L would take ownership of both Rem's Death Note and Ryuk's Death Note. That way neither shinigami could kill him before he was ready. Kira's line would not be discontinued prematurely.

"And if you decide not to be Kira anymore?"

"Then you can keep the notebook and destroy it, and Rem will leave, and all my memories of being Kira will be gone, and I will help you to erase Kira's name forever."

L was silent for a moment. "You know that Kira's name will not be forgotten. Not for a thousand years at least."

Light shrugged. "If we are not Kira, Kira's name will be forgotten one day. But if we are Kira, Kira's name will never be forgotten because his reign will never end."

The static hung in the air for several moments. "I will get the notebook and the shinigami, and then we will begin." The static cut out for a few minutes, in which Light stared steadily at his clasped hands, and then L was back. "The shinigami is coming to you. She disappeared through the floor and— Oh."

Rem was floating down through the ceiling, passing right in front of the main camera.

Light nodded to her. "Rem."

She eyed him with dislike. "Light."

"Did L explain to you what we're doing?"

"Yes. You're giving up your ownership of my Death Note."

"He's giving up his memories," L clarified.

"That's the same thing. Losing your memories is only a side effect of losing your ownership."

"Hm."

"Only temporarily," Light cut in. "You can't leave afterwards. Remember, L has your Death Note."

She looked expressionlessly irritated. "I understand. Alright. Go ahead."

Light's heart beat strong and confident. This would work. He took his letter out from where he had slipped it under his pillow, and he laid it on top of

the cot. "Oh," he said suddenly. "Do you think I'll seize?"

"I don't know," L said.

There was a moment of surprised silence at the fact that somehow neither of them had considered this. "Well," Light said, sitting down. "Just in case." He took a deep breath, chest unexpectedly tight. "Okay. Here we go. Rem, I give up my ownership of your Death Note."

"Hyuk hyuk hyuk."

He absolutely screamed.

"Huh? Light?"

"Shit," Light ground out, scrabbling backwards, sweat breaking out at his temples. "How do you know my name?"

"Light, what's gotten into you? It's me!"

"Light-kun—" It was L's voice.

"RYUZAKI," Light screamed. "GET IT OUT."

"Ryuzaki?" L echoed, apparently more surprised at this than the sight of a demon in Light's cell. Was L seeing this? Or had the brain cancer pushed him over the edge into hallucinations? "Light-kun, this is just Rem. Don't you—? Oh. I suppose you don't. Huh?" There was a pause, in which Light continued breathing heavily, and the demon loomed, still, grinning angrily. "Who is Ryuk? Rem, are you not the only shinigami in this room?"

"Rem?" Light demanded breathily. "Ryuzaki, who are you talking to?"

"Ohhh," the demon said, and it cackled. "You can't see Rem and you can't remember me because you gave up your memories, and L can't see me because he hasn't touched my Death Note. Don't worry, Light. I won't hurt you."

"Memories?" Something clicked, and he looked down at his wrist. His watch was gone. He was in a prison cell with L's voice and a demon. He knew L had put him in here. He knew L had speculated that he had been losing his memories inorganically. He knew that L was almost certain he had been Kira. But why did he know so little else about however much time had elapsed since the watch? "Ryuzaki, I think I lost more of my memories."

"You gave them up," the demon said.

Why would he do that? Unless—? Light went cold. "Am I—am I Kira?"

"You were," L said.

"And now?"

"Read the letter."

Light spun around, looking, until he saw the paper at the foot of the bed. He picked it up, and saw that it was covered in his own handwriting. "I wrote this?"

Softly, L said, "Yes."

Light vaguely remembered being up late last night, working on something, but he couldn't remember anything he had written down. He read the letter with fresh eyes.

Yagami Light,

You won't remember this right now, so I am going to remind you what happened to bring you to this point. On November 23 of last year, you were sitting in class, looking out the window, bored out of your mind, just like every other previous day. Then you saw a black notebook fall from the sky. After school, you went out and picked it up. On the front it said Death Note, and on the interior, there were instructions for how to write someone's name in the book to kill them. You thought it was a sick joke. You almost left it

behind. But you kept it with you, so that no one else would be taken in by it, and because you were bored.

You went home. You knew it was just a sick joke. But maybe it wasn't. You decided you would have to test it out. But you didn't want to hurt anyone you knew personally, and you wanted to make sure you could see the results immediately. You were very careful about it all. You found a criminal on TV, a criminal who was holding children hostage—children!—and you wrote his name in the Death Note. Forty seconds later, he died of a heart attack. The children were all saved. But you didn't get swept away. You had only conducted one trial. It could have been a coincidence. You went into the city, a hotbed of evil. A man was trying to rape a girl, right in the middle of the sidewalk. Shameless. Imagine what he would do behind closed doors. You wrote his name in the Death Note, and this time you specified how he would die, to make sure it couldn't be a coincidence. It happened just as you wrote it down. The girl was saved. This man would never violate anyone ever again.

You knew you had in your possession a great power. The power to kill. You had three options: you could abandon it, you could destroy it, or you could use it. But you couldn't abandon it. Men like the ones you had killed could find it and use it for evil. You could destroy it, but then the world would stay as it was, steeping in its own filth. Or you could use it—for good. You would kill criminals, and protect the innocent. You were planning on being in the police force anyways. Why wait to start protecting people? Innocent people were being murdered and violated and wronged every day. You were frightened by the prospect of having so much power. But someone had to do it, and who else other than you could handle the burden? You were willing to give up your whole life to protect the world. But it wouldn't stop at protecting. That was where the police force went wrong. Their goals were too small, unlike yours. You would cleanse the world of evil, and create a new world, where all people were good to one another. And you would lead this new world, as a god, with exceptional power—not just the Death Note, but yourself, your innate powers that make you fit to lead above anyone else.

This new world is coming, and it is coming soon. L will join you, if you decide you want to pick up the burden once again and continue your work. All you have to do is accept it. Tell L that you want to continue being Kira, and that you want to do it with him. He will agree. And together you will bring the world into a new era.

Yagami Light

Light read the letter three times, and then held to it with shaking fingers. He lifted his face, mouth trembling, and asked, "How many—?"

L understood, and sighed. "You know how many. You looked at the data."

Light swallowed. "Thousands."

L let the number hang in the air.

"You were only slightly responsible for the deaths of three people, and you have nightmares every night."

"I've sent dozens of people to be executed, and you had nightmares at first."

"I did?"

"Yes. You told me about it in the limo."

Light stared down at the letter silently. The handwriting was beautiful, without a quaver in sight. "What does it say about me that the nightmares stopped?"

L did not attempt an answer.

"What—?" Light's voice broke, and he felt like a child. He cleared his throat. "What do I do now?"

"Now you decide whether you would like to continue being Kira."

"Think about it," the demon urged, through his grinning maw. "Think about how bored you were before. Isn't this the first time you've had fun?"

Light retched over the side of the bed.

"Yuck," the demon said.

There was a cold touch on his elbow, and Light looked up to see another demon looming over him, its whole body made of bleached bones. He shuddered away, falling back into his pillow, unable to speak or even breathe.

"Light," the bleached demon said, moving one outstretched spiny finger away from him, "you told me that I couldn't leave after you gave up your memories, because L has my Death Note. Are you planning on taking it back from him?"

"No!" the grinning demon protested. "*I'm* giving him my Death Note. Shove off."

"Don't give it to me!" Light cried, recoiling.

"What?"

"I don't want it!" He was shaking and close to tears. "I don't want any of this!"

The grinning demon coughed a single laugh. "Of course you do."

"I don't, dammit! Leave me alone!"

The demon's mouth was still grinning, but the rest of him was scowling. "You *promised* me, Light. Don't you know that I'm bored too?"

"Light-kun." L's voice was gentle and prodding. "Do you still remember the bet we made?"

"Bet?"

"You agreed to give up your memories of being Kira, and if you still want to be Kira afterwards, I will join you as Kira, but if you no longer want to be Kira, then you will join me against Kira."

Light shuddered at the thought of L being Kira, at the thought of them being Kira together, murdering thousands together, going to sleep beside one another with the knowledge of what they were doing, fucking with the knowledge of— He retched again, emptily.

L saw, of course. "So far, I am under the impression that I have won the bet, and that you no longer wish to be Kira."

"Light," the demon practically whined, baring his jagged teeth, "your boyfriend is messing with your mind. Where's the Light that I know? I thought you wanted to be the God of the New World."

"There must have been something wrong with me," Light murmured. "Maybe it was the brain cancer. There's no way I would ever—I *couldn't*—there must have been—"

"You knew what you were doing," L said, soberly. "I don't wish to cause you any additional psychological pain, but it is important for you to know that it is possible for you to choose to be Kira again, rationally, because you chose it once."

Light grimaced. "How could you say that? I thought you didn't want me to be Kira."

"I don't, but if I don't let you choose properly, that would be cheating. I want to win fairly."

The demons were waiting. Shinigami, L had said. Gods of death. This was what Light had wanted to be, under another name. The God of a New World. Killer.

"I know," Light said, softly. "I read the letter. I know I could choose to be Kira, of my own free will. That's what frightens me the most."

And he scooted down on the bed, gathered up the bedclothes, and pulled them tight around himself. The grinning demon was furious. He spat abuse at the lump in the bed, stormed around, and then *whooshed*, and his voice cut out. The static of L's microphone cut off, and when L's voice returned, it was to say, "The shinigami Ryuk has tried to convince me to become Kira, and he had in fact forced his Death Note upon me. I am currently in possession of both Death Notes. Would you like me to destroy them now? Do you think there is any risk of them killing me out of spite? Though I suppose it wouldn't matter terribly at this point. Nevertheless, I will hold onto them for now. Since you have decided not to be Kira, I will consult with Watari in the morning regarding our next course of action. To be perfectly honest, this is not a conversation I am looking forward to. Nevertheless, I will tell you what he says."

If all went as Light was currently planning, by the time the following morning rolled around, all the oxygen would have been used up under the covers, and Light would not have the chance to be told anything ever again.

L's voice was at the door the following morning.

"Here is your breakfast, Light-kun. Watari is still sleeping, so I hope it is satisfactory. Your prochlorperazine is in the little silver cup. Please take it. You remember what happened the last time you didn't take it.

"At least, I think you remember. It's alright if you don't remember. You threw up, is what happened. It's important to take the prochlorperazine, even if it gives you nightmares.

"I know you had a lot of nightmares last night, and I'm sorry about that. They seemed worse than your usual prochlorperazine nightmares. I suppose that's to be expected.

"Please eat, Light-kun. I'll tell you how the conversation with Watari goes, once he wakes up."

"Here is your lunch, Light-kun. I see you didn't eat your breakfast or take your prochlorperazine. It's not too late for either of them. The fruit and biscuits should still be good, though probably not the coffee. And the coffee was perhaps not ever good, because I made it myself.

"Watari was... Well, he was upset, of course, but he was not nearly as mad as I would have expected. He's mostly concerned about you. He says I should have done the bet without the shinigami in the room, so you wouldn't be as frightened. He's right, I suppose. I apologize for startling you with the shinigami.

"Watari doesn't want you out of your cell yet, even though you are no longer Kira. With the shinigami and the Death Notes still in the building, he thought it would be too dangerous to let you out. And I agree with him. I'm sure he'll reconsider once we destroy the Death Notes.

"Do you want to do that now? I don't want to destroy them without your consent. I... I *believe* I won the bet, but it is difficult to know for certain when you are not speaking.

"And, Light-kun— Well, I... I don't mean to invade your privacy, but you really should use the restroom soon. You must need to. You haven't in over sixteen hours.

"Please take your prochlorperazine. And if you need anything, Watari and I are always ready to help you. We understand that this must be quite a shock. Please take care of yourself. We're only trying to do the same."

Light almost made it to dinner. At ten past five, L heard the violent vomiting and saw the lump still firmly under the covers, and he was in the cell in less than a minute. By the time L managed to wrestle Light out of bed, the sheets and Light's pants were both soiled, and he was weeping terribly. L dragged Light over to the toilet to finish vomiting, after which the toilet was no longer needed. Light was brought into the shower wearing all of his clothes, which were slowly pulled off, with neither help nor

resistance on Light's part. No eye contact was made, no words were exchanged, and L spoke only when necessary.

Watari had made his way through the cell while L and Light had been in the shower. He had gathered up Light's clothes and bedclothes, mopped up the floor and made the bed, and left dinners and real clothes at the foot of Light's bed. L put on a dry set of clothes, his usual white shirt and jeans, and then dressed Light in a sweater and corduroys. Light's time as L's prisoner was slowly coming to a close.

Light disappeared under the covers the moment they reached the bed. He would not eat or drink, even when L tried to feed him, and he would not take his prochlorperazine. L ate his dinner at the foot of the bed, and then he scooted closer, crouched next to Light's legs, and he set one hand on the lump and talked softly about his day. He was working on a case for Deneuve. The job was still open for Light to take. Watari had baked a cake. L hadn't slept last night, so he was tired. It was a good thing that Watari had gotten so much sleep last night, so that L could try to sleep tonight. Then L fell silent for a little while.

"Do you know why I made the bet when I did?" he asked softly. Light did not stir. "It was because of what Watari and I saw on our way back from the oncologist. There was a traffic jam because of what everyone was seeing on the news screens. Someone had made an announcement on Kira's behalf. I'm sure that someone was Misa. We have surveillance on her apartment, but she must have been careful and worked somewhere else. I'm sure you know what the announcement was, because I'm sure you were the genuine Kira who sent it. You must have communicated with her somehow, perhaps through a shinigami. Perhaps through the shinigami Ryuk. I would love to hear one day how you did it. How you did it all, really. Though I suppose even you don't really know anymore, and perhaps you don't want to think about it.

"Anyway, the announcement had been made earlier in the day, and they were now showing the responses of significant figures to the announcement. When Watari stopped the car, it was because the pope was

saying in an interview that he believed that God was using Kira to carry out divine punishment. I caught myself starting to believe it too, just for a moment. I came to myself at once, but the seed was planted. Perhaps you were right. Perhaps Kira was just. I decided that the way to find out would be to ask you, unswayed by the perspective of being Kira. I trusted you to make the right decision. Perhaps I trusted you too much. I don't know. I do think you made the right decision, and I'm sure Watari thinks the same. He's become very sympathetic towards you, you know."

There was a long pause, and then L's thumb began moving in slow circles. "I love you. Do you know that? You said I didn't tell you enough, so here I am saying it. I can't imagine how hard this must be for you, with your identity flipping every chance it gets, but if it's any reassurance, your identity has been the same since the day I set eyes on you. Have you heard that people form impressions of one another in the first tenth of a second? From the very beginning, I knew that you were Kira, and I knew that you were brilliant, and I knew that I wanted to spend more time with you. You will always have been Kira, but now you are not, and now you are a brilliant man who I want to spend time with and who I love dearly. I wanted to tell you, in case you had forgotten. I still think your ego doesn't need any more boosting with praises and love confessions, but I suppose I can make an exception this once."

L fell silent, and the thumb went still, and then Light felt the faint pressure of a kiss through many layers against his right hipbone.

L went back upstairs a few minutes later, and Light did not take his prochlorperazine.

10. Chapter 10

As always, thank you guys for your stunningly sweet reviews. You rock and roll. C:

I had my wisdom teeth out earlier this week, but I'm off the Vicodin now, so this should be coherent (I hope?). Can you guys tell whether losing the wisdom teeth gave me more or less wisdom? ;)

We've got two chapters to go (ahhhh so soon!), and the next chapter should have a pretty fun scene in it, so that's something to look forward to. (Sorry if this chapter is a bit light on the action. Light is in a bit of a low spot at the moment, and he almost wouldn't come out of bed at all.)

I don't own Death Note or anything written in ancient Greek.

It would have been one thing if the only knowledge Light had was that he had been Kira. But Light had worked on the Kira case for half a year with the world's three best detectives, and accordingly he knew more about Kira than anyone could care to know. When he closed his eyes, he saw himself shooting Otoharada Kurou point-blank. He saw himself cracking open the ribs of Shibusamaru Takuo. He saw himself strangling Lind L. Tailor with a cold metal chain. He knew that at least a dozen of Kira's victims had later been proved innocent, and he had seen three interviews with innocent victims' families. He knew that Osoreda Kiichiro's ex-girlfriend had said that he would never try hallucinogenic drugs again, not after that first bad trip, and maybe there really had been a monster on that bus. He knew that he had heard Aizawa crying in the hotel bathroom in the days following Ukita's death. He knew that Misa had been tortured for information, and he knew that she would live with shadows of those memories for the rest of her life.

It was more guilt than anyone could reasonably bear. Sometimes he wished to have his memories back, for his heart to be guarded by that impenetrable

fortress that was Kira, and every time he wished that, he hated himself more.

It took Light at least two hours to get out of bed every time he had to go to the bathroom. The urge usually hit after a particularly violent burst of vomiting, which he did over the side of his bed into a wide metal bowl affixed to the bedframe, positioned so as to necessitate the absolute minimum amount of movement out of the covers. The cot was only a few meters away from the toilet, but the struggle was mental, not physical. Every time, it was the same impossible task accomplished through a different laborious way.

One time he might be afraid of the prospect of having control over his own body. He might remember how it was his control over his own body that had resulted in the deaths of thousands, and he might weep, silently, guiltily, with every twitch of a muscle. He might start hyperventilating on the floor, less than a meter away from the toilet. He might take another hour to repeat the whole process all over again and get himself back into bed.

Another time he might be unable to exert any control over his body whatsoever. He might order his arm silently, "Push the covers over your head!" for twenty five minutes before his arm would do a thing. He might stand in front of the toilet silently ordering his hand to unzip his trousers for ten minutes. He might wind up back in bed with his clothes soaked through with sweat from the sheer exertion of movement.

Another time he might be at a loss as to why he should make it to the toilet at all. He might renounce any shred of dignity he may have been under the illusion of still having. He might renounce any attachment he still had for L or Watari, who would have to clean up his mess. He might spend one hundred and nineteen minutes convincing himself that it mattered that he made it to the toilet and back, and then get the deed over with in a minute.

After that first one, he didn't have any more accidents. Now it was just a matter of sweat, tears, and time.

Light refused to eat or drink for three days. On the second day, he stopped vomiting up anything other than a terrible clear liquid. By that afternoon, L was in Light's cell threatening to make Watari put a feeding tube down his throat if he didn't at least start drinking water. Fortunately, at this point, Light no longer had to use the bathroom, so he could avoid L's eyes and block out most of his voice by staying under the covers the whole time.

On the morning of the third day, L was unexpectedly absent, either over the speakers or in the cell. Light even peeked out from under the covers a couple hours after waking up, just to make sure that L wasn't napping in a corner somewhere. He wasn't. Perhaps he had given up. Perhaps Light was being left alone to die, just as he wanted.

He wasn't.

Lunch arrived with the sound of rustling bags. The tray clinked as it was set on the ground, and no comment otherwise was made on its presence. "I went shopping for you, Light-kun," L said. "Watari was understandably concerned about my ability to shop with any degree of success, but I think I did alright." Understandably, indeed. Light was having trouble believing it at all.

A bag rustled. "I tried on all the clothes, keeping in mind our physical differences, so hopefully they fit about right." Light couldn't begin to imagine the state of L's hair after pulling so many tops over his head. "Here is a sweater." L carefully folded over a corner of the covers, so that Light's thumb peeked out into the cool air. The fabric moved slowly across his thumb, and he had to admit that it was very soft. "Here is a button down. Here is a turtleneck. Here is a coat. Here is a scarf. I don't know if you wear them, but I was told it looked very nice with the coat by someone who did not appear to be lying. Here is a pair of jeans. Here are some socks." Everything was incredibly soft. It must have cost a fortune. "Perhaps one day you can try them all on. Perhaps we could put on a show for Watari, and I could help you backstage. It might be fun." Light could hardly think of anything more silly.

The bag rustled as the clothes were put away, and then another bag rustled. "Here is a variety of coffees and teas. First the coffee, then the tea." L nudged the covers away just a smidge more, and, one by one, four rich coffee blends wafted in, followed by another four strong tea blends. "We could try one a day for a week. You would have yours black, and I would have mine with half the sugar jar, and Watari would have his somewhere in between." Light was not hungry or thirsty, but he was ever so slightly addicted to caffeine, and somehow that didn't sound quite so bad.

"This is the last bag." The bag rustled, and then something else rustled. It sounded like the pages of a book, except wispy and smooth. Then the rustling paused, and more conventional page turning started up. "Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλὰ πλάγχθη ἐπεὶ Τροίης Ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσεν." *The Odyssey*. More page turning. "μῆνιν ἄειδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος οὐλομένην, ἦ μυρί' Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε, ἔθηκε." *The Iliad*. Now back to the thin rustling. "Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγος, καὶ ὁ Λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, καὶ Θεός ἦν ὁ Λόγος." The...Bible? "I very much enjoyed the challenge of reading in Greek with you, and I thought perhaps we could read more of it together. We even could learn another language together. I recall that Hebrew was suggested at one point." The mention of Hebrew was pulling at a twinge of an unsettlingly fuzzy memory, but the Greek was reminding Light of perfectly crystal clear memories of L's fingers moving over his skin to trace words like ἔρως and κάλλος and ζωή, and of other parts of him moving over his skin in less legible ways.

And, as if knowing what Light was thinking, L's voice came very close to the edge of the covers as it said, "Please, let me in," and Light did not resist when the covers moved to let L inside and then closed over the both of them.

It was a very small cot, and they were very cramped, and Light had not bathed in two days, but L did not seem to mind. He crawled over Light, carefully, closely, so that the covers would not let in any air, and settled behind him. He shifted a few times, trying to find a comfortable position, and tugged at the sheets to cover them properly. Moving slowly, giving Light space to protest, he hooked one leg over Light's side, slid one arm

around his chest, and ducked his mouth into the crook of Light's neck. Light's heart pounded as if this were the first time L had been so close.

L felt the pounding, and he murmured, "Are you happy, or upset? Do you need me to move farther away, or closer?"

Light was sure that L had meant to set the questions up the other way around, so that the formers matched and the latters matched, but his answer ended up being the unmatched latters. He began to cry softly, and he hugged L's arm tighter to his chest.

L clung back. "I'm sorry," he said, sounding very sorry indeed. "I'm sorry you're so sad. But I also suppose I would be sadder if you weren't." L said it so simply that for a moment Light didn't realize it was true. "I'm sorry. I love you."

And for a long while, L was silent and still. Light expected him to perhaps start crying with him, or write messages in Greek under his shirt, or whisper philosophical nothings in his ear, but L did none of these things. Rather, he was endlessly patient. He held Light tight and secure, and he breathed evenly, and neither of them experienced any of their limbs falling asleep. After an hour, L shifted and murmured, "I need to take a piss." Light could think of very few less romantic sentences to ever have come out of L's mouth. L clambered over Light's form, climbed out of bed, pissed, washed his hands, and climbed back into bed in the same position. But Light had had quite enough.

"Why," he said, voice rough with dehydration and disuse, as he turned to face L, "the fuck have you not made a move yet?"

L blinked, only marginally surprised. "I beg your pardon?"

"You have been spooning me for over an hour," Light explained, voice picking up ever so slightly with irritation, "and you have given me exactly zero kisses."

"Given your current condition," L explained, quite calmly, as if this wasn't their first conversation in three days, "I thought it best to move slowly, and to allow you to let me know when you were ready for physical affection."

Light scowled. "Well, I'm ready *now*."

L did not look convinced. "Are you sure? You were crying when I first came in your bed."

"Yeah, maybe because I'm so guilty I want to die."

L was only tripped up by that for a few seconds. "And why have you changed your mind now?"

"Because just because I'm guilty doesn't mean I'm not human."

"So, you're still feeling terribly guilty."

"Of course."

"And you still want to die."

"Of course."

L frowned. "I don't want to just be a distraction from your psychological struggles. It sounds vaguely unhealthy to try to seduce you away from your guilt."

"You didn't have any qualms about trying to throw money at my guilt."

"You mean the gifts?"

"Of course."

"I wasn't trying to make you not feel guilty. I was trying to show you how much I love you."

"Then you were trying to throw love at my guilt."

"No, I wasn't. I wanted to show my love for you for the sake of showing my love for you. And I do want you to eat and drink sometime in the near future, but I was planning on getting to that much later. I've been following the advice Watari gave me."

Light thought he was going to choke. "Watari told you to come down here and seduce me?"

L smiled briefly. "Not quite. I told him that I didn't know how to help you anymore, and he said, 'We love because he first loved us.' I was surprised, of course, and I didn't know if you had necessarily loved me first, or whether you had ever loved Watari period, but I figured I had better love you as best as I could while I still had the chance. It was only after I had already left for the store that I figured out that he had probably meant capital He."

Light twitched in something like a smile. "Maybe Watari gives pretty good advice sometimes."

"Maybe. He also told me that I should forgive you, but I told him I didn't think that would do you any good."

Light remembered Watari's forgiveness, and he recalled that the forgiveness had come while he had still been Kira.

L peered closely at Light's silence. "But," he said slowly, "maybe he was right about that too." Light could no longer quite breathe. "I forgive you," L said, carefully, as if testing it out. "I forgive it all," L continued. "The criminals. The bystanders. Naomi. B."

Light's lungs began to resume functioning, and he managed, "Everything?"

"Everything."

He didn't want to ruin it, but he had to know. "The strangling?"

"Yes."

"You said..." The memory was faint, but it was there. "You said you didn't know whether you could ever forgive me."

"I didn't know," L confirmed, sadly. "And I'm sorry about that. But I know now. I can. I've been learning how these past couple days." He rolled his eyes suddenly, like a child. "Watari has been forgiving me every chance he gets, and he's been encouraging me to say it to him too when he slips up." Then his brow creased. "And this coming from the man who never liked admitting his mistakes. I still suspect brain cancer or something equally terrible."

L's forgiveness meant a great deal, but somehow it didn't touch the weight of the guilt. "I still want to die," Light disclosed, suddenly speaking like it was a secret.

"I'm sorry," L said. "You will, much sooner than I would like, much sooner than even you would like, deep down where it counts. But right now you need to live."

"Why?"

L considered for a moment, giving legitimacy to the weight of the question, and then he said, "Because both ends of the philosophical spectrum necessitate it. Do you remember our conversation about the purpose of life?" Light nodded. "You said that the purpose of life was to make the greatest possible positive impact on the world. According to this viewpoint, you should spend your final days contributing positively to the world rather than contributing zero. And since you are no longer Kira, there is no risk that your negative contribution could exceed your positive contribution. So, according to that viewpoint, you need to live. On the other hand, the alternate viewpoint said that the purpose was to glorify God by enjoying Him forever. According to this viewpoint, you should spend your final days being reconciled to God, carrying out good works as fruits of your faith, and spending time in His presence. Since at this moment you are not reconciled to God, your life can only get better from now on out, because you may still be reconciled in the near future. So, according to that

viewpoint, you need to live. Both viewpoints that we have considered show that you need to live."

Light reflected on this, and he knew that L was right, but that didn't make the guilt any lighter, and it didn't make Light any stronger. "I still want to die," he said, "but I suppose I could try to not want to want it."

L closed his eyes and sighed. "Thank you. That's all I ask." And then he opened his eyes, and added, "Well, I also ask that you eat lunch and take your damn prochlorperazine."

"I will if you kiss me first. Hard."

"I will if you drink a third of that glass of water."

Light hated every moment that he was drinking the water, because it meant that he was one step farther away from dying, but he did it, and L kept his promise. Light was a bit more reluctant to keep his end of the promise, especially since his stomach had rejected sustenance for so long, but he managed the prochlorperazine and almost half of the small lunch, which was good enough for L, who gave him several more kisses as a reward. It turned out that L had been right to want to go slowly, because Light's body was more eager than his psychological state, and fortunately L was patient enough to listen to the latter over the former. L offered to help Light into the shower, and Light said no without quite knowing why. L was not offended. He said he would let Light shower on his own then. He promised to be back with dinner.

Before L left, he said, "I hope this isn't too big of a question, but would it be alright if I disposed of the Death Notes now? I wanted to get your formal consent first. Rem and Ryuk have been leaving me alone, I think because they know it's only a matter of time until—"

"Yes."

"Oh. Well, if you're so sure—"

"I am."

"Do you want to be present for—?"

"Burn them. I don't ever want to see them again."

Light was not better, but he was better. He took his prochlorperazine and stopped vomiting, but he could never manage to finish any of his meals or glasses of water. He showered on his own, but not more frequently than every other day, and L was not welcome inside. He spent most of the day in bed, in the cell, because the Death Notes were destroyed but Watari was still not quite convinced that Light was safe, and so Light was not convinced either. He sometimes struggled to reply to L's voice, and he sometimes struggled to respond to L's kisses, and he always struggled to make it to the bathroom, and he always had nightmares.

A week after the Death Notes were destroyed, Light seized for five minutes in the middle of the night, and neither L nor Watari knew about it until afterwards, because recently he always looked and sounded like that while he was sleeping.

Just like everything else important, it happened in the middle of the night. One second, Light was quite literally drowning in the blood of every person he had ever killed, and the next second, he was being shaken awake by L's hands and insistent whispers. "Shhh," L was saying, "it's just me. Please, don't say anything. Just listen. We're leaving. Do you need to use the bathroom before we go?"

L had literally just told him not speak, but Light couldn't help it. "What's happening?" he groaned, rubbing at his eyes and sitting up. "Why do we need to leave?"

"I can't stand seeing you cooped up in here for the last few months of your life, but Watari still isn't convinced that something terrible won't happen the

moment we let you go free. That's why we need to go now."

"You're—you're busting me out?"

"Yes, of course."

"Without Watari knowing about it?"

"Well, he certainly isn't in favor of it. Now, please, do you need to use the bathroom?"

Light's head spun. "I—I don't *want* to leave. Not like this."

L looked mystified. "You don't?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Ever since Watari forgave me, he has only been looking out for my best interests. If he thinks it's dangerous, I don't want to risk it."

"And what if Watari thinks it's dangerous up to the very end of your life?"

"Then maybe I could put up some posters on the walls or something, you know, to liven up the place."

L sank down, seating himself on the edge of the bed. "Really?"

"Yes."

"This is really what you want?"

"Yes. I appreciate what you're trying to do, but I think we should listen to Watari on this one, just to be on the safe side."

"What if Watari thought it was safe, but I changed my mind and thought it was dangerous?"

"Then I wouldn't go out. I would want both of you to think it was safe before I risked it."

L nodded, slowly.

"That's enough."

Shit. It was Watari's voice, loud and steady, over the microphone. Light jolted, but somehow L didn't look concerned about having been caught.

"He passed."

"Huh?"

L grinned, and he looked ready to pump his fists in the air. "Thank you, Watari."

"What's going on?"

"I'm sorry we deceived you, Yagami-kun," Watari said, sounding strangely bothered by this despite the vast majority of his entire career probably having been based on deception. "Technically nothing L said to you was a lie, but they were truths said in such a way as to deceive you. I'm sorry."

"I don't care about that," Light said impatiently. "I just want to know what's going on."

"I do want to get you out of this cell," L said. "I hate seeing you like this. And Watari hates it too, but he couldn't be sure that you didn't have some system set up to become Kira again the moment you left. We decided that I would offer to sneak you out, to see how you would react. If you agreed to leave, you might have some way of becoming Kira again, and it would be too dangerous to allow you to do so. But if you refused to leave, you would have anticipated your own refusal, and you would never have set up such an improbable way of being Kira again. It's possible that you could have anticipated our bluff, but we only came up with the plan recently, so it's

unlikely. The both of us have decided that it is no longer too risky for you to leave your cell."

Light's brows tugged together. "You mean, I can walk around the rest of the building with you?"

"Yes. You can even walk around the rest of the building without me."

"With a blindfold?"

"No, with your eyes."

"Do I need to be blindfolded when I go to my appointments?"

"Of course not. Light-kun, you could even be the driver."

"You would let me drive you?"

"You could drive by yourself if you wanted, without me or Watari coming with you. You can drive anywhere you want. Well, health and medication permitting. If you have any motor seizures, you shouldn't drive anymore."

"I can go places by myself?"

L sighed sharply. "Light-kun, we're telling you that you are no longer being detained. You're free. If you so choose, you can decide to never see us again. You can go live with Misa for all we care. Well, we would care if you did that. We want you to live with us. But if you really want to live with Misa, we can have that conversation."

"I haven't been free since May, so forgive me if I'm having a little trouble getting used to the idea again."

L frowned briefly. "We haven't been cruel to you, have we? You understand why we've been keeping you here, don't you?"

"Of course you haven't, and of course I do. I'm a mass murderer for goodness' sake. But that doesn't mean that it hasn't been awful. I mean, it

was almost solitary confinement half the time."

"We are sorry," Watari chimed in. "If there had been another way—"

"I know. I'm not mad at you. I'm just saying."

They all fell silent, and then L set a careful hand on the lump under the covers that was Light's knee. "So, are you ready to go? We have a bedroom all set up for you. Your own bedroom. It's connected to my bedroom with a door that locks from your side. There's one security camera running inside, for your own safety, but none of us will be looking at the footage, unless someone tried to kill you or something. And if you really want, we can disable it. We just want to make you comfortable."

"I..." Light looked down helplessly at his wrists. First the handcuffs had come off, and now every other control on him was coming off as well. It made his head spin. "I think I'd rather spend the rest of the night down here."

L blinked, shocked. "You...would?"

Light nodded, still staring at his wrists, which still had faint dark marks all the way around, darker on the left wrist than the right. "Maybe tomorrow I'll try going upstairs."

L made a little noise like he was going to protest, but Watari said, "We understand, Yagami-kun. Take all the time you need. We'll let you get some rest."

L's hand lingered on Light's knee. "I'll see you tomorrow morning. Please, try to sleep. I love you."

L didn't close the cell door when he left. Light tried to fall asleep for an hour, and then he got out of bed, closed the door, and was asleep in minutes.

Light woke up early the next morning, which he knew both from his precise biological clock, and the little clock that had showed up next to his bed. The red numbers read 5:39. Light's nightmare of being chased by the corpses of his victims was fading, slowly but surely, and he rolled out of bed, shed his clothes, and stepped into the shower, even though he had already showered the day before. He paused while drying off to stare contemplatively at the expensive department store bags sitting in the corner of the room, dismissed the idea, and then changed his mind again by the time his hair was dry.

He lay all of the clothes out on the bed and dressed slowly, trying everything on. At the bottom of the bag, next to the socks, were three pairs of underwear that L had not pulled out, perhaps so as to not be too forward. They were just as soft as everything else. Light put on new underwear, new socks, the new jeans, and the new turtleneck, and he very much wished that he had a mirror. Somehow, he hadn't missed it all this time until now.

It was 7:12, and Light was standing in the middle of the cell, trying to decide whether to go upstairs or wait for breakfast to be brought to him at 7:30, when he saw the little white slip of paper on the door. The kanji was written in wobbly handwriting that had to belong to L, who didn't hold his pens properly enough to make smooth characters. He would have made a terrible Kira.

Light started at the thought, because it was such a Kira-like thing to do, to judge someone like that on their handwriting, and yet he had thought of it all on his own without any of the memories. He recalled the conversation he had had with L in the shower, when they had been puzzling over the blood on his arm, when he had said that if Yagami Light had been Kira once, then he would always be Kira, and he would always be responsible for what he had done.

The note said, "Watari and I will be eating breakfast together at 7:30. If you wish, you may join us. If you do not care to join us, your breakfast will be brought down at 8:00."

Light was certainly not up for a family breakfast. While Watari and L were otherwise occupied, perhaps he would wander around the building, and get a taste of what it felt like to be alone. He pulled the note off the door, and walked outside.

L had apparently anticipated this plan of action, as there was another slip of paper on the opposite wall, just a few meters away. This time it was a smiley face, along with the words, "Good morning!" A meter on either side was another slip of paper. To the left, it said, "This way is the elevator." To the right it said, "This way is empty cells, which are boring, but you can go there if you want." The handwriting got cramped at the end, and the final three kanji skidded down the side of the paper. Light peeked down the hall to the right, and then went to the left and found the elevator, where there were more pieces of paper. He shoved the paper from his room into his pocket, and wondered how long L had spent running around, putting these up.

Light took the elevator up to his room, which was attached to L's room, just as promised. Both doors were unlocked. Light went into his room, which was comfortable and normal and large, and then he went back into the hallway and went into L's room, which was the same, only messier where he had thrown his dirty laundry in the corner and dropped his towel in the middle of the floor. Light tried the door that connected their rooms, and found that it was locked, just as promised. He left it locked, and took the elevator on a tour of a few more floors.

Light was not interested in eating with L and Watari, but he definitely was not opposed to eavesdropping on them. He took the elevator up to the floor right above them, and then climbed down the stairs so that they wouldn't hear the *bing* of the arriving elevator. He slipped carefully up to the open door into the kitchen where there were voices, and he sat down just out of sight. He hadn't spent too long exploring, and it sounded like they were just about to start breakfast.

"—sure I shouldn't make more pancakes?"

"You've made quite enough. I doubt Light would even want pancakes. He's never touched them when we've tried to give them to him."

"Alright." There was a small noise as Watari sat down with effort. "And you're sure you don't want any fruit?"

"Entirely."

"Alright. Then, let's get started."

There was a spot of silence, not even filled with chewing, and then L said, "Go ahead."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Aren't you going to say grace at me?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"You hate it when I do that."

"So you're just not going to say grace?"

"I'm going to say it in my own head." There was a long silence. "You look angry with me."

There was another long silence, and then L burst out, "Just tell me the truth. I can handle it. You have brain cancer, don't you?"

Holy shit but L was actually saying it.

"Don't give me that look. We all know you've been acting strangely lately. Even Light has noticed."

"I can assure you that I do *not* have brain cancer. Don't you trust the CT scan?"

"Maybe you could have paid the doctors off to lie to us. Or maybe the cancer just didn't show up. They didn't use contrast, did they?"

"No, but—"

"I knew it!" L crowed. "How much longer do you have? Is it in the frontal lobe?"

"Sit down! I don't have brain cancer. Is this just because I've been happier lately?"

"Not just happier. *Nicer.*"

"So, you're saying that the only explanation for my kindness is brain cancer?"

"Yes."

Watari sighed. "I would say that I resent that, but it really only says volumes about my abysmal parenting. Roger always told me I shouldn't have raised you on my own."

"Don't change the subject. Tell me what's going on. Is this a trick? Are you trying to get something out of us? Don't tell me that Light has managed to turn you into Kira."

"Kira? Oh, good Lord. Maybe this is a conversation I should have with both you and Light. You kids are entirely overreacting. At this point, you perhaps won't even believe me when I tell you what I think it is that you're noticing."

"So there is something going on. We knew it. Tell me first, and then we can break it to Light, slowly."

"Why don't I tell you both right now?"

"Now? You want to drag Light up from his—?"

"Yagami-kun!" Watari called, and Light froze, wondering whether he should scramble back into the stairwell. "I can see your shadow in front of the door. There are lights in the hallway, you know."

Guiltily, Light crawled over and peeked his head into the doorframe. L was turned around in his chair, his eyes wide, and Watari was smiling on the other side of the table. "Morning," Light said, standing up.

"Morning," Watari said.

"Morning." L gaped. "They fit."

"You look very handsome, Yagami-kun. L, you did a good job."

"Thanks," Light said, sitting at the place set for him, the dishes empty but for one little cup of prochlorperazine and one little cup of water.

"Thanks," L murmured, still wide-eyed. Light couldn't tell whether he was more surprised by Light's presence or by his clothes.

"So, you *have* been hiding something from us," Light said. He took his prochlorperazine quickly, to get it out of the way, and set the cups off to the side.

Watari gave a sort of shrug. "If you could call it that. You kids should have told me a long time ago that you were worrying about it. But, first, let's get you some food."

11. Chapter 11

Thank you all for being such giant sweethearts. You give the best reviews anyone could ask for. C:

This chapter doesn't have the funny scene that I promised, because I couldn't get to it as quickly as I had planned, so sorry about that. It's definitely definitely going to open the next chapter though, so you can look forward to that. Plus, this change means that the fic is going to be 13 chapters long instead of 12 chapters, so woot woot, more time with you and L and Light and Watari. :)

I realized that I should probably note that I have nothing against the current pope. He's pretty rockin', as far as I know. I'm sure (I hope?) that he would never actually support Kira.

I don't own Death Note, the Bible, or the math puzzles I adapted from the internets.

Watari was eating a very British breakfast, with bacon and toast alongside the pancakes, though he had made natto gohan and miso soup for Light. It called attention to just how far the three of them had come in the past few months, to what extent the secrecy and formality had slowly dropped away. L and Light listened and ate quietly.

"I suppose it started when I realized that you kids were together, the night we all went to the hospital for the first time. I was horrified, of course, but I did my best not to let it show."

Light saw in his peripheral vision that L flinched, which made Watari pause.

"I don't mean because Light is a man, of course, whatever Roger might have to say on the subject. I've come to quite my own conclusions over the years. I mean, because my son was in love with a mass murderer."

When had Watari started thinking of L as his son, rather than almost his son? And when had L, who had not flinched this time, accepted this designation of Watari as his father?

"I admit, Yagami-kun, that I felt a bit more amenable to you when I found out that you had brain cancer, because it's difficult to hate someone with cancer, and because L and I both thought that the cancer perhaps had something to do with you being Kira. And perhaps it did, but then you really became Kira, and you attacked my son, and you killed Higuchi, and we both saw the tapes that showed your face as you did so. You were remorseless."

Holy shit. They had tapes of the whole time that Light had been Kira with them. He could remember if he wanted. He could watch himself kill. He could watch himself strangle the man he loved. He could see Kira with his own eyes. Did he dare? He felt sick, despite the prochlorperazine he had just taken, and he set his chopsticks down.

"And so I was remorseless in return. I allowed myself to hate you. I doubt that you remember the conversation, but I went to you when I thought L was fast asleep, and I admitted to you that I wished you dead."

Now Watari had set his fork down, looking concerned, and L was the only one still eating, munching steadily on Pocky and maple syrup with a pancake.

"Admitted is perhaps a light word. I was cruel to you, and again all I can do is apologize for my behavior. On the day that you got back from your second oncologist appointment, you and L were discussing the Bible, asking each other which was your favorite part."

Had they really asked each other that? Who could have brought that up? What could Light possibly have answered? It was an important religious and historical document, of course, but people didn't have favorite parts of it. That would be ridiculous.

"Your conversation made me feel guilty about not having an immediate answer to the question, and about not having gone to church in so long. I went looking for my rosary in the middle of the night, while it was L's shift and I was supposed to be sleeping, but I couldn't find it, and I couldn't remember the last time I had used it anyways. I found a Bible eventually, something I had picked up in a hotel somewhere, perhaps, though it was the New International Version, so perhaps not. Regardless, I was flipping through, a bit aimlessly, familiarizing myself with the order of the books again, when I heard a voice saying, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'"

L's eyes had gone very wide, not because Watari had shifted into English to quote this voice, but because Watari was hearing voices period. Light could just imagine what L was thinking. *Schizophrenia. Twenty two percent. No, twenty four.* But Light had researched schizophrenia before, and Watari didn't seem to have schizophrenia. In fact, his mental health seemed better than ever. Light was sure that L would be on an online symptom checker before long, just like he had done with the cancer, but he wasn't so sure that L would end up finding anything.

"That was what God said to Paul in the book of Acts—"

"I know," L murmured, surprising them both.

"Well, yes. I don't mean to imply that I think I'm Paul, or that I think I'm being called to be the next great leader of the church, though the pope could certainly use a whack upside the head, if you ask me. It was just a shock to be compared to someone responsible for killing and imprisoning every early Christian he could find. I didn't understand, and quite frankly I was offended at the suggestion. I even said so out loud, feeling quite silly all the while, if you must know. But there were no more voices. Still, I was feeling guilty and unsettled, so I looked down to where I had stopped flipping, and I decided that it was as good a place as any to start reading. I started right there in Romans 12 and I made it all the way to the end of the chapter. Do you know what it said?"

Watari looked at them expectantly, as if he actually wanted an answer, but L was still slurping up his maple syrup, so Light ventured, "Thou...shalt not...murder?"

Watari shook his head. "It said, 'Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment.' It said, 'Be devoted to one another in love.' It said, 'Practice hospitality.' It said, 'Do not repay anyone evil for evil.' It said, 'You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister?' I must have read these five chapters dozens of times since then. Every time I read these words, it's like I read them with fresh eyes, and a fresh heart." Impossibly, he set a careful, wizened hand over Light's. "Yagami-kun, you are a brother to me. You are a son to me. I will do everything I can to show Christ's overwhelming love for you, and I will apologize every time I fail miserably to do so."

"What about the weeping?" L's voice was hard, though it was a bit difficult to take him seriously when he was in the middle of licking his plate clean.

"The weeping?"

"You were weeping," L said into his plate. He lifted his head, a sticky spot of maple syrup on his nose. "You were weeping, and you were singing a hymn."

Watari went red, but he said, "So I was."

"Well?" L demanded.

"What can I say? I was...overwhelmed."

"How so?"

Understandably, Watari looked uncomfortable to discuss his tears like this, but he powered through, looking down at his plate. "I felt...the love of God. I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. I felt the weight of all my mistakes, and I felt the glorious relief of forgiveness through Jesus' work on the cross."

L looked unconvinced.

"I told you that you were overreacting, and that you wouldn't believe me."

"Excuse me for doubting your sudden conversion, when I had been under the impression that you had been Christian from the womb."

Watari looked contemplative. "I don't know whether my faith was genuine in the past. I certainly didn't act like it, but who can know for sure? I'm only glad I can spend the rest of my life truly knowing the Lord."

Light was suddenly struck by how old Watari was, and how he would inevitably die one day, likely when L was still relatively young, in the next decade or two, perhaps. L would be alone. What would he do then?

L peeked over at Light questioningly. He was wondering whether Light believed it, or whether he thought Watari was hiding something else. Light was skeptical to be sure, but Watari seemed like he was being honest about it all, and now that shinigami were real, who knew what else could be out there? L saw something like this answer in Light's face, and he looked peeved. He shook his empty box of Pocky at Watari meaningfully.

"Are you sure you don't want any fruit?"

"Quite. Light tells me that I need to gain weight."

"I just said that you looked like you were losing fat and muscle," Light clarified, not wanting to sound like he was some asshole criticizing his boyfriend's appearance. "I wanted to make sure you weren't starving. I'm sure you can eat fruit and still gain weight."

L shook the Pocky box thoughtfully. "I suppose," he said slowly, "I could have some strawberries."

Watari's hand, which was still on Light's, gave a little squeeze, perhaps a thankful one. "Coming right up."

Light had been standing with his hand on the doorknob for nearly half an hour. This was almost worse than being stuck when trying to go to the bathroom.

L was somewhere on the other end of the door separating their bedrooms, perhaps working on a case, perhaps doing some obscure research, perhaps showered, perhaps still in the clothes from that day. But definitely cuddly. Yes, there were almost certainly cuddles waiting for Light on the other side of that door.

It felt silly to think like that, but Kira had been in his brain for so long that it also felt nice to think things that Kira would never think. Detoxing. Like pouring lavender laundry detergent into his ears.

Light was so busy imagining lavender laundry detergent swirling around his cancerous brain that he didn't even hear the footsteps until they were already at the door, followed by a deep breath, and then hesitant knocking.

"Yes?" Light said immediately, betraying that he had already been waiting at the door.

"Oh," L said, startled. "Good evening, Light-kun."

"Good evening."

There was a moment of awkward silence, and then L asked, "Can I come in?"

"Can I come in?"

The silence happened again, and then L said, "Of course."

It still took Light a few seconds to work up the courage to actually unlock the door, but it was worth it seeing L standing there in his pajamas, which were Light's favorite set of them: a white tee shirt and blue pajama bottoms, both of which were *ridiculously* soft. L knew how much Light liked them, which maybe was why he had been prompted to buy so many soft clothes

as a pick-me-up for Light the other day. But something was different today. Light always liked how L looked in pajamas, but this time—

"Your hair."

"Hm?"

"It's not wet."

L shrugged. "I took a shower early, so it would be dry for you. I know you hate when the bed gets wet."

That fucking cutie.

Light attacked him, if you could call it that, because L responded so consensually that he almost lifted Light off the ground. They didn't tear each other's pajamas off, partly because they both quite liked each other's pajamas, and partly because L had somehow picked up on Light's cuddly, lavender laundry detergent mood, and he was responding in kind. They ended up scavenging all the pillows they could find on the floor to make a pillow tent on L's bed, inside of which they curled close and gave one another math puzzles to solve.

"A restaurant sells sushi in boxes of six, nine, and twenty. What is the largest amount of sushi that you cannot order from this restaurant?"

"A criminal is trying to sneak a prisoner out of jail. The jail is surrounded by a square moat that is ten meters wide, from bank to bank. The criminal can only find two planks that are nine meters long each, but he manages to cross the moat regardless. How?"

Sometimes the math was too complicated to be done without paper, and the riddle had to be explained with the algebra waved over, and sometimes the riddle was mathematically unsound or physically improbable, and they got to tear the riddle to pieces. Eventually, it started getting late in the night, and the ratio of speech to silence grew smaller and smaller, until L said that he couldn't think of any more riddles.

"I have one last one," Light said, brushing through L's bangs with his fingertips. "It's an easy one. Straight algebra. Nine X minus seven I is greater than three times quantity three X minus seven U. Solve for I."

L did the algebra out loud, slowly, and answered, uncomprehending, "I is less than three U?"

"Yes."

"Yes?"

"Well, write it out."

L scrawled it lazily into the air above their heads, and he only had to get to the three before he started smirking. He turned and pressed closer, kissing, and then murmuring, "I is less than three U too."

"I hope you mean you too, and not U2."

They fell asleep in each other's arms, and they woke up in Light's screams.

Light had good days, and he had bad days. At first, the ratio of good days to bad days was increasing. L let him take over as Deneuve, pulling back to focus on Eraldo Coil, whose last case had been the Yotsuba one. Watari didn't even protest, seeming to genuinely trust Light not to abuse the responsibility he was being given. Light really was free. There were times when he would ask L a clarifying question, repeat the question upon not gaining an answer, and finally look up, irritated, only to find that L was not in the room at all. The realization would come with a stab of loneliness, but then he would take a deep breath, write down the question to ask L later, and continue working. He wouldn't have the luxury of health and autonomy for long, and he didn't intend to let himself waste it.

The mental stimulation of being a detective was a glorious rush after spending so long in prison. And, yes, the cases were heavy, filled to the

brim with death and treachery and corruption, but what could be worse than the Kira case? That's what he thought at first, at least.

It turned out that the Kira case was disturbing in terms of quantity, but not in terms of quality. Kira was clean, killing with heart attacks most of the time, only otherwise if he was experimenting or being sneaky. Heart attacks were clean. People exploded from the inside, without leaving behind anything but the tears of their loved ones. And even these tears were sparse, because it was criminals that were dying. Kira was not a public figure who could lie, cheat, or steal. He could be said to be wrong, but he could not be said to be selfish. He did not degrade women or minorities. He was not fabulously wealthy. In some ways, the Kira case was overwhelmingly terrible. But in other ways, the Kira case was the clear, fresh surface of the vast ocean of crime.

He told L that he loved the work he was doing, but L could see that it was taking its toll on him. When Light had finished solving the two most pressing of Deneuve's cases, L suggested that they go for a vacation. No work. No real world. Even no Watari, if he wanted. And he could choose the location, of course. But Light could hardly imagine having so much time to sit uninterrupted in his own head. Just when he had thought that Kira had taught him all he could about know human cruelty—his own cruelty—he discovered that he had a lifetime of learning ahead of him, and this new flood of information was swirling through his brain like raw sewage. He doubted that even a week of lavender laundry detergent would be enough to get it out.

Besides, it was only a matter of time before Light would look at the tapes.

It took more than a bit of digging, but he found the files eventually. There was an obscene amount of information, and he didn't know where to start. He eventually picked the tail end of October, because he couldn't remember the exact date, but he knew he must have become Kira again somewhere around there. The 29th was when the prison footage started, so he worked his way back from then. There he was, in the evening, sitting in his cell, perched at the edge of the bed, staring at the floor. No, not perched. Rooted.

Like a boulder. Like a statue. Like a thousand kilogram missile. Why was his mouth curving like that? Light shuddered, and rewound the tape. He had been sitting in that same position with that same awful curve to his mouth for the past two hours, ever since he had pulled himself off the ground. Why had he been on the grou—? *Oh.*

"*FUCK.*" The laptop shuddered with the force of the speakers, and Light scrabbled to turn the volume down. "*FUCKING HELL.*"

"Light?"

Dammit. L had heard. Light knew he should have scavenged for some headphones. He paused the recording, just as he saw himself digging his fingernails into the ground. His face was contorted. He hadn't even known the muscles around a human being's mouth could move like that.

L was knocking at the door. He had already tried the handle, which was locked, and he didn't bother trying it again. "Light-kun, what's going on in there?"

"I'm watching—" TV, Light had meant to finish, but he couldn't focus enough to lie. All he could hear was the echo of his screams rattling around in his skull:

fuck fucking hell fuck fucking hell fuck fucking hell fuck fucking hell fuck fuck—

There was a sigh on the other side of the door, and it was almost louder than the echoing screams. "Light-kun, please let me in. I'm not angry with you for watching it. It doesn't even have to be a secret. You have just as much of a right to the recordings as we do. Just, please, let me in. I don't want you to watch it alone."

Light considered for a few moments, and then said, "I don't want you to watch me watching it."

"I won't watch you. I'll watch *with* you."

"I don't want to watch it knowing that you're watching too."

"Why? Because it will make you feel guiltier?"

Light compressed his mouth, and looked at his expression on the screen. He wished desperately for the resolution to be grainier.

"Isn't the only reason you're doing this to make yourself feel guiltier?"

"No."

"No?"

"I'm watching because I want to remember."

"You won't remember. That's not how the memories work, and you know it. All you'll be doing is forming new memories."

"It was *me* back there, and I want to know what I did."

"I'll tell you then. But there's no need for you to experience it. I think I've experienced it quite enough for the both of us."

Light was quiet, the mouse hovering over the play button.

"Light?"

"At least let me watch what I did to you."

"I'm not letting or not letting you do anything. You can make your own decisions. I'm just giving you advice because I love you."

Light stopped responding, and eventually L stopped speaking. Light couldn't be sure whether L had gone back to his bed though, or whether he was still waiting by the door.

Light waited five minutes, and then he muted the laptop, and watched his meltdown all the way through. It was like watching a horror movie. He watched it two more times. Then he rewound to where he was put into the cell, to where he was handcuffed, to where he was getting dressed, to where

he emerged from the bathroom in a towel with a naked L, to where he sat crumpled on the bathroom floor in the middle of a conversation, to where—*Oh.*

It was indescribably worse than he could have imagined. After that first second, after he saw the look in his eyes when he jackknifed his arm up, snagging L's foot in the chain, he knew he had seen enough. He knew had seen more than enough, a thousand times over. But he couldn't stop watching. And it couldn't stop getting worse. The look in his eyes burned brighter and brighter. The panic in L's eyes grew wider and wider. The metal in L's skin cut deeper and deeper. Then L gagged, visibly, terribly, and Light's mouth curved, upwards, terribly, and he muttered something, and Light threw the laptop across the room, hard, where it crashed and clattered and closed and stayed altogether in one piece.

Light's hands shook, and he was pretty sure he would never stop being nauseous, no matter how much prochlorperazine he took.

Goddammit. He was a fucking idiot. He was never going to be able to sleep properly again.

The ratio of good days to bad days was decreasing.

"Why won't you touch me anymore?"

L was snuggled into Light's side as he asked this, so Light wasn't entirely sure what L could possibly be talking about.

"Actively, I mean," L said. "You don't mind if I touch you, and you'll touch me if I ask you to, but you never initiate contact anymore. Not since—"

L didn't finish, and Light didn't need him to.

"Is that why?" L asked in a small voice. "Is it because you watched it?"

Light exhaled, slowly, shakily. "I don't want to hurt you. It makes me sick to think of hurting you, even a little bit. I never want to touch you like that again, against your will, not even once. I— Well, I didn't realize that was the impression I was giving you. I thought I was just being more cautious. I'm sorry if I've been inattentive, or ungenerous."

"So, it is because you watched it?"

"Yes, of course."

"So, it isn't—"

Light waited. "Hm?"

"It...isn't..." L said slowly, quietly, barely more than a breath, "because... you...find...me...unattractive?"

Light frowned. "What?"

L ducked his head, and spoke more quickly, and even more quietly. "If I've been eating too much, or too little, you know you can—"

"Shut the actual fuck up." Light struggled into a sitting position, dislodging L from his chest. L lay propped up on his elbow, with his head down. "Do you know how much of an asshole you're making me sound like? Do you actually think I would stop loving you if you dropped or gained a dozen kilograms?"

"I don't think you would stop loving me," L said, still not looking up. "But if you were dissatisfied, physically, I mean, it would be understandable. We both know you were out of my league, physically, to begin with."

"I can't believe this is happening," Light declared, first to the ceiling, and then again, to L, "I can't *believe* this is happening. You had better just be looking for compliments, because otherwise I'm going to have to demote you down to Deneuve cases only, because your deductive reasoning is slipping."

"Don't tease, Light-kun. I'm being serious."

"I can't believe you think so badly of my boyfriend."

"Light-kun. Please."

Light sighed and fell back into the pillows, crossing his arms over his chest.
"Fine. First of all, I'm upset with the people around you for giving you the impression that you're somehow in some unattractive league."

"It's true."

"Stop it. Why are you doing this?"

"My hair is a disaster, but keeping it long is the only way that it feels comfortable. I feel twitchy for weeks after Watari gives me a trim." L said it like an apology and a defense, and Light was surprised by how much he cared. He had always thought that L kept his long for that very reason, because he didn't care what anyone else thought, not because he actively wanted to keep it that way.

"I love your hair. You know how much I play with it. It wouldn't kill you to comb it more often, but I wouldn't mind doing that if you asked me. I get the feeling it would bother you though, to have someone else comb your hair."

"I like when you wash my hair."

"I know. But that's different."

"Hm." L thought for a moment. "So, my hair doesn't bother you?"

"No. As long as it's clean, I love it."

"But I'm scrawny, and I have terrible posture."

"You're a real athlete underneath it all, and you know it. I don't care how much you weigh. I just want you to be healthy. And you do have terrible

posture, but I've seen you stand up straight, so I know you can still do it, if you wanted to. You still have time to work on it before you're an old man stuck like that."

"So, you don't mind my body?"

"Mmm, I love it."

"Dark circles?"

"Side effect of the insomnia, which is a side effect of the nightmares, which are bad, but the dark circles themselves are perfectly fine."

"Clothes?"

"They're plain, and I would love to get you in a suit one day, but you're comfortable in them, and I don't mind as long as they're not dirty. Really, you're quite an attractive human being, and the only things that concern me about your appearance are the things that suggest that you aren't as healthy or clean as you should be."

L thought about this for a while longer, and then he said, "Do you think we would ever have been together if not for the brain cancer?"

These were memories that Light remembered quite well, and he thought through the sequence of events that led to that first kiss with L. "The brain cancer certainly helped bring us closer, which made me comfortable with joking around with you with the blow dryer. But it was when I landed on you, and you had your hair all fanned around your face, and your cheeks were red with laughing, and you were breathing hard... You were so human, not just L the impossible detective, and I was sitting on you. Something clicked." He remembered a little while longer, and then said, "We would have gotten together eventually. It was always just a matter of time."

L absorbed this answer, and then he admitted, "That wasn't exactly what I meant."

"Hm? What did you mean then?"

"Do you think," L asked, very slowly, "that the brain cancer lowered your inhibitions?"

Light frowned, confused. "You mean, the swearing?"

"And—" L ducked his head, and Light understood.

"Oh." He frowned deeper. "You're wondering whether I would ever have let myself fall in love with you if not for the brain cancer."

"Mhm."

"I... I'm not sure. I think I would have, eventually. Though I might have overthought it when you kissed me. I might have been worried about what my father would think. I might have been worried about my reputation. I don't think I ever would have made the first move. I wouldn't have thought you would ever be interested in something like that with me. But, now that I am in love with you, I know that nothing could change my mind."

"Do you think," L asked again, "that you would have become Kira if not for the brain cancer?"

The thought settled like bile on the back of Light's tongue, caustic and bitter. Eventually, he said, "I think that with Kira and with you, it was only a matter of time. The parts that I hate about myself were inevitably drawn to being Kira, and the parts that I love about myself were inevitably drawn to you. But both were also choices that I made. I chose to be Kira, and then one day I chose to not be Kira. I chose to love you, and I every day I choose to love you again. The parts of myself that I love have won out over the parts of myself that I hate, for now, but if the scenario was played out over and over again, I'm not convinced that the winner would be the same each time."

They were both quiet, and somber, and afraid. L shivered, and Light reached out to hold him tight.

"I love you," he said. "You've had trouble believing that in the past, but do you believe it now?"

"I don't know," L said. "I hope so. I'm doing my best."

A month had passed. In the last week, there had been two good days, and five bad ones.

He seized.

It had been a long time since the last one, and it was like in all that time, the neurons in his brain had been storing up energy for one massive misfire. It still wasn't a motor seizure, thank God, but it was a long one. He was hit by the wave of *déjà vu* while sitting at his computer, flipping through pictures from a murder scene, which triggered all sorts of awful Kira feelings, as if the seizure by itself wasn't bad enough. He couldn't speak at all for fifteen straight minutes, and when he finally could, the words were broken apart by sobs.

L called for Watari, of course, but there was very little either of them could do. L held his left hand, and Watari held his right one.

One to two good months, his oncologist had said. Was this the end of the good months? Did he only have four months left to live? Or, if he was going downhill faster than expected, did he only have two months?

"I don't want to die," he said, as if just realizing it for the first time. "It's not fair."

They were silent for a long time. Then, L glanced over at Watari, who nodded. "Light-kun, I have an idea."

12. Chapter 12

Thank you all for your phenomenal reviews. They mean the world to me. :)

Finally we have the funny scene(s?) that I promised, which ended up being funny in parts I didn't expect and sad in parts I didn't expect, but hopefully you enjoy. We've got one more chapter to go, and it should include things that are both very expected and (hopefully) very unexpected.

There was a question about Light's comment that the Bible is a historically important document, and it's actually pretty neat to find out that the Bible is a surprisingly accurate historical document. With the New Testament in particular, the books were written soon after the events they describe, and the writing has been really well preserved, so that's cool.

I don't own Death Note or First Corinthians.

It was the first time Light had used public transportation in over a year. Not much in the neighborhood had changed in the intervening time, but somehow that made it even more terrifying. At times he would have to check himself to make sure he wasn't having a seizure. He wasn't. He was perfectly fine. Except that he wasn't.

Watari had offered to drive him. But Light had turned him down, saying that he didn't want to be an inconvenience, and that he didn't know how long he would stay there anyways, and that he was perfectly capable of doing it on his own. L had chimed in at this last point, saying, "Watari, Light-kun is a full-grown adult. He has had more than enough life experience to safely take a bus by himself." When Watari had pointed out that Light wasn't technically an adult yet, L had said, "Of course he is."

"No, he isn't," Watari had corrected, quite rightly. L had frowned at that, and Watari had reminded, "Age difference."

"Just six years," Light had interjected, feeling a little embarrassed.

"Seven," Watari had corrected, not disapprovingly, just firmly.

"I turned twenty-five two months ago," L had said ruefully. "I forgot to tell you. Sorry."

"Oh." God, L was a lot older than him. How weird. "Well, I'll be nineteen in two months, so we'll be back at six years soon." An awkward silence had collapsed that conversation, because Light also might be on his deathbed in two months. Light hoped he wouldn't die on his birthday, because that would definitely suck.

Watari had finally broken the silence by clearing his throat and pulling a cell phone out of a nearby drawer. "Hopefully you won't need it, but our contact information is in there if you need a ride, or if you have a question, or if you want to stay for longer than just the day."

Light had taken a deep breath and had put the phone in his pocket, feeling nervous. "You're sure they'll be there?"

"We're certain."

"Not because we have cameras there," L had added. "Just because of today."

"Today? What's today?"

L's eyes had widened hugely. "You don't know?"

"He'll find out soon," Watari had said, chuckling a bit. "It should be a pleasant surprise."

Looking out the bus windows and listening to the conversations of the passengers, he had figured out the day within five minutes. Honestly, it shouldn't have taken him nearly that long. It was a disgrace that he had let himself lose track of the days like this.

The bus ride was over all too quickly. He was walking on his own two feet, the pavement speeding past him alarmingly no matter how slowly he tried

to go. Everything looked exactly the same. They hadn't missed him at all. It stung, but just for a moment. This would make things easier, after he was gone for good.

"ONII-CHAN."

"Oof!"

Light had barely registered that it was Sayu who had opened the door before she was flying through the air towards him, knocking them both backwards onto the sidewalk.

"Sayu?" That was his mother's voice, sounding even more anxious and weary than usual. Had Sayu been acting out while he had been away? She looked about this same, though she had cut her bangs shorter and sharper across her brow.

"Light is home!" Sayu cried, laughing. She threw her arms around his neck, hugging him tightly, *very* tightly, so that she could get a good hug in before he shoved her away.

But when was the next time he would get to hug his sister? Ignoring the pain in his back from the fall, he reached his arms up and hugged her back. Sayu froze for a moment, and then, seeming to sense the significance of the moment, burst into tears.

"Light? Light is home? Oh, my— Light! Dear, Light is home! Dear! Light is home!"

Light and Sayu were pulled off the ground and into the house, where hugs were distributed freely and tears were had by all and Sayu kept saying, "Light is home! For Christmas Eve! It's a Christmas miracle! Light! Light is home on Christmas Eve!"

This was how Watari and L had known that his whole family would be home.

His mother ushered them into the kitchen, where the table was set with a full meal, complete with Christmas cake and fried chicken. Even if Light lived as long as he possibly could, this would be his last Christmas Eve dinner.

His mother was in the middle of a question about whether he had gone back to university when he said, sighing, "Oops." They all looked startled, because Light didn't say things like that, because Light didn't make mistakes like that. "I forgot my prochlorperazine," he explained. "I take it with meals, so I won't be nauseous." They all looked uncomfortable and afraid, unsure of whether to ask if the nausea was related to the cancer, unsure of whether Light's sickness would spoil dinner, unsure of whether mentioning the cancer would spoil Christmas Eve. "I should be alright though," Light said quickly, and he really would, for a few hours at least. He wouldn't be able to spend the night though, or he would almost certainly leave behind a small lake of vomit on the floor. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt you. No, I'm not back at university. I'm working, as a sort of private detective."

His father looked up at that. *L*?

Light looked back. *L*.

"Light," his mother said slowly, treading into dangerous water, "if you're working to pay for your medical bills... We'll always be here to support you, you know. Your father has changed his mind about disowning you—"

Disowning him? When had that happened? Had his father figured out that he had been Kira? The horror almost showed on his face, but then it clicked, and he remembered: this was the excuse they had used to account for Light's absence during his imprisonment, that he had moved in with Misa and his father had disowned him. At this point, Light almost wished it had been that simple.

"—shouldn't need to worry at a time like this. You're always welcome in this house, Light."

It really was touching to hear, even if he hadn't been under the impression that he had ever truly been disowned. How had Sayu reacted to hearing that such a thing could be possible? Maybe she hadn't been acting out, even a little bit, after all. "Thank you, Mom. I really appreciate it. But the job is just to keep myself occupied, and to make sure I'm still contributing to the world. My...well, my employer, I suppose, who is a private detective too, is paying for all the medical bills."

His father, who knew who this wealthy private detective employer was, didn't so much as blink, but his mother gaped. "All the medical bills? That's very generous! Who did you say you were working for?"

How truthful could he be? He didn't want to lie to his family any more than he had to, but he couldn't just say that the great detective L was forking out as much money as Light could ever need. But, after all that he had put them through, he owed them the truth. What truth could he tell them instead?

"Better make sure a girl doesn't date you for your health insurance," Sayu teased.

"Sayu!" their mother reprimanded quietly, presumably not wanting to bring up the subject of girls and Misa and disowning again.

Oh. Now *that* was a truth he could tell them. Did he dare?

"By the way, I'm actually not dating Misa anymore," Light said, his heart thundering. It didn't usually do that. Maybe he was about to have a seizure. Or maybe this was his body's way of telling him that this was another truth he needed to stay far away from, like L's identity and his own past as Kira.

"Aww!" Sayu lamented. "But she was so cute!"

"She was very nice," his mother chimed in.

She had been the Second Kira.

"I don't want you to stop dating her just because of me," his father said, a bit gruffly, perhaps thinking that Light was still playing along to get back on good terms with the family. "Like your mother said, I've changed my mind. I'll always support you, no matter who you're dating."

There could never be a better opportunity. His father had walked right into it. Light took a deep breath and forced a smile. "Thank you, Dad. That's really great to hear. You see, I'm actually dating someone else now."

Sayu gasped. "Oooh! I'll miss Misa, but this is exciting too!"

"That's where I'm living now, actually. And that's who's paying for my cancer treatment."

His father frowned quietly at that, not in disapproval yet, because he was simply confused at the moment. He had thought Light's employer was L, but of course he couldn't imagine Light dating L of all people. But who else could be employing Light as a private detective and paying for his medical expenses?

"Wow, she sounds so cool!" Sayu said. "A rich private detective dating my brother! I want to meet her!"

Light laughed despite his nerves. "Thanks, Sayu. Maybe I'll bring him over sometime. We'll see."

His mother's eyes went very wide, but Sayu just said, "Huh? You said 'him', Light."

"Yeah, I did."

The puzzle pieces clicked in his father's head, and he choked on his fried chicken.

Ten minutes later, his father had recovered his ability to breathe and speak, but for another ten minutes after that, he employed very little of either

ability, inhaling his dinner rather than oxygen, while Sayu prattled nervously about the goings on of her life in the past seven months. His mother just kept looking between Light and his father with a calculating sort of fear, obviously terrified that Light was going to get disowned again. Sayu was just beginning to run out of things to say when, to everyone's relief, the doorbell rang. "I'll get it!" Sayu crowed, leaping out of her chair. There was a moment of horrifying silence through the whole house, but for the sound of Sayu's footsteps, and then the door opened, and Sayu cried, "Misa-chan!"

Light's stomach dropped to the floor, and for a moment he was absolutely certain he was moments away from throwing up, or at least minutes away from a seizure. Neither was true. These were emotions, fear and regret and guilt and shame and panic, and they couldn't be cured with the simplicity of popping a pill.

Light heard his chair legs scraping across the ground before he realized he had stood up. "Come in!" Sayu was saying. "We're just finishing dinner, but you're welcome to join us."

Misa had no family, so she had no reason to be home on Christmas Eve. And evidently she didn't have a boyfriend to spend the evening with either. Shit. She probably thought she and Light were still dating. Did she still have her memories of being the Second Kira? Both Death Notes had been destroyed, so she shouldn't have been able to remember. But what if she had kept a piece of paper with her, just like Light had kept a piece of paper in his watch? If the rest of the Death Note had been destroyed, did the scrap of paper still have any power? Could a person have possession of a scrap of a Death Note in the same way that they could have possession of a whole Death Note? If Misa did have her memory, did she have it temporarily or permanently? Could she give Light his memories back by touching him with a scrap of the Death Note, by accident or on purpose?

Light's mind was racing, strategizing, shifting into a mode that made him feel sick—no, *rotten*. He felt like Kira, and he hated it.

Misa stood in the doorframe leading to the kitchen. "Good evening," she said, giving a little bow. "I'm sorry for interrupting your dinner. I heard from one of Light's friends that he was back home, and I had to see him."

Who could have told Misa that he was here? L and Watari certainly wouldn't have done so, even if they had hoped it would give Light some resolution. It was too dangerous. They would never put Light at risk of becoming Kira again, even as a test. Could one of his classmates have seen him on the bus? But who of his classmates would be in contact with Misa?

Sayu and his mother were looking at him questioningly, wondering whether Light would want to see Misa in the first place. Sayu's eyes were bright yet concerned, and she was probably wondering whether it had been a messy breakup. His mother was holding her breath, and she was probably wondering whether Misa could turn Light straight, and whether that would be enough to stay the disowning. Light would have to see Misa for at least a few minutes, to show his family that he wasn't an asshole who would be rude to his ex-girlfriend, and to find out whether Misa was still a threat.

"Good evening," Light greeted, nodding back. When he lifted his gaze again, he saw the grinning shinigami, peeking out into the kitchen.

"Hyuk hyuk. Good evening, Light."

Light's blood ran cold, and he straightened completely. Goddammit. The demon had found Misa. This wasn't over. "Mom, Dad, is it alright if Misa and I talk in private? We shouldn't be too long."

"Of course," his mother said breathlessly. "Take as long as you need."

The former Kira, the former Second Kira, and a demon all climbed the stairs up to Light's room. "Hey, Light," Ryuk hissed on their way up. "Do you have any apples? Misa doesn't have the same ones as you. They're not as juicy, but I don't know which ones I should tell her to buy instead."

Light had fed this demon apples, like a pet? What the hell had he been thinking?

He ushered them into his room and locked the door behind him, the motion feeling too familiar in his wrist for comfort. Misa took a seat at his desk chair, smoothly, with it turned towards the bed, but he didn't sit down, instead standing with his arms crossed over his chest. There was no point wasting time. "So, you have your memories back."

She smiled, but not with as much enthusiasm as his memories would lead him to expect from her. "Yes, thanks to you." She reached into the bodice of her dress and pulled out a tightly folded piece of notebook paper. "I saved this when you sent me Ryuk's notebook, so I could send the message as a prophet for Kira. I hid the piece of paper, and I told Ryuk to come back to me when you had ownership of the Death Note again. I wanted to have my memories of you, but I didn't want to take ownership by accident, so I had to wait until you already had it. I gave up my memories, and then when Ryuk came back, I took the paper back out, so that whenever I was holding it, I would remember you. But the memories came back for good. Ryuk told me that it was because L had destroyed the Death Note, and this piece of paper was all that was left of it. The paper isn't enough to be Kira for long, because the page will run out, because it isn't attached to the book. And I'm sorry about that, but it is enough to have ownership, and to have memories." She held out the paper, like a gift. Light flinched, and she angled her head curiously. "Ryuk told me you didn't have your memories anymore, but I didn't realize it would make you this different. You're not afraid of us, are you?"

Light swallowed down his thundering heart, and said, "Terrified."

Misa frowned. Her mouth pinched, cutting off a question.

"What else did Ryuk tell you about what happened?"

"He told me that you were...dating L." Her fair brows pulled together. "He told me that you were in love with L, but I told him that I knew that wasn't true. You dated other people when we were together, but that didn't mean that you loved them. And you could never really love someone like L. I knew it must have just been a trick."

Offense was rising in Light's throat like bile. "Why would you say something like that?"

"You're always doing things like that as a trick. Being Kira means the world to you, and you would do whatever you had to, even *that* with L."

Would he really? Would he have made L fall in love with him, and pretended to fall in love with him too, all the while not actually loving him back? Misa was confident that he would, and she was right. This kind of sickness was the worst kind of sickness of all, because it was guilt, and it made him feel as small as the tightly folded piece of paper in Misa's hands.

"That wasn't what I meant," Light said softly. "I meant, why would you think I could never love L?"

"Well." Misa's mouth quirked, and her nose turned. "*Look* at him. And look at us."

This was what L had been afraid of. Misa really did think that someone as beautiful as L was ugly. And in the past, Light could imagine himself thinking the same thing.

"You're wrong, and Ryuk is right."

"Hyuk hyuk hyuk."

Misa frowned, and her nails bit into the soft lace of her dress. "I don't understand."

Light pointed. "Put the paper down on the ground."

Her eyes sharp, considering and questioning and rejecting rebellion, Misa did.

Light pulled his sleeve down over his hand, picked up the paper, and shoved it in his pocket. He would take it back to L, and L would burn it, and this nightmare would be over. Misa didn't have any other pieces of the

Death Note hidden, just like the first time they had met. "I love L, and L loves me. There's no trick. I'm not Kira anymore, and I never will be Kira again."

Light was utterly serious, and Misa saw. Her eyes flamed, and she stood. "Coward," she accused, hands fisted. "You're just saying this because you're *dying*."

Light flinched.

"I gave up half of my life for Kira, because I knew it was the right thing to do. But now that your life is on the line, you won't give up a single thing. Kira is justice, but you're just a coward."

"Why do you keep talking about Kira like it exists?"

Misa stared at him steadily. "What do you mean?"

"Kira isn't a person. Kira isn't a job. Kira isn't a power. Kira is a nickname I took for myself to justify murdering people who I thought were baser than me. I won't allow myself to do such things ever again, and as long as I live, I'll do my very best to stop anyone who tries to follow the abysmal example I have set."

"You're wrong," Misa said, quite confidently. "Kira protects the people. Kira saves the oppressed. Kira fights evil. Kira stands for everything that I believe in. And if you won't be Kira, then I will."

After seeing it so many times in L's eyes, Light knew what that look meant. It meant that she was ready to fight, but, unlike L, she was going to fight to win.

He thought about running away, into the living room where she would never dare attack him, but she was already lunging. She had lifted one of her legs to kick him in the groin, and he knocked her other foot out from under her, leaving her to crash backwards to the floor. L was trained in capoeira, and he almost matched Light in height and weight, but Misa was

no athlete, and because of her job she was chronically underweight. She was pitifully small next to Light's modest frame, and kicking her had felt like kicking a child or a cat. Fuck.

But Misa was still as strong as she could possibly be, and she was quickly on the offense once again, crawling across the floor on her belly, this time going for his legs, trying to pull him down. All Light could think to do was to pin her arms and torso to the ground, to stop her while hurting her as little as possible. He shifted his weight towards her rather than away from her, a seemingly perplexing move, which gave him the split second he needed to tear his legs out of her grasp, pivot around, and land on top of her. There was nothing admirable or courageous in the hold that he managed on her wrists, or in his weight crushing her slim torso to the ground, and he was crying silently by the time he had her securely in place.

"DAD!" he screamed, and Misa stilled, slightly, at his voice. She hadn't imagined that he would ever call for help. "DAD, PLEASE! DAD!"

His father was at the door in a matter of torturous seconds, with his mother and Sayu following close behind, but when he tried the door, it was locked. Shit. Why had Light so automatically done that? "The door is locked!" his father shouted. "Light, what's going on?"

"Misa attacked me," he said, feeling terrible and ashamed. "I—I have her pinned, but I don't want to hurt her. Please. What should I do?"

"*Misa* attacked you?"

Light closed his eyes. "I know how it sounds. I'm sorry, but you have to believe me."

"Get off, coward," Misa said into the ground, her voice cold and small. "You didn't have to involve your family in this."

But he did have to. Other people were the only thing that protected the world from Kira. Light knew Misa's determination and mental strength, and the only other way she would have given up on getting the last existing

piece of a Death Note would be if she had been completely incapacitated. Light was never going to do that to another person again.

Misa sighed, and stopped struggling. She was smart, and she knew when she had been beaten. She couldn't attack Light again with his family on the other side of the door. Light let her go, feeling just how much strength he was letting flow out of his grip, and the tears continued to fall. God, he hoped he hadn't left any bruises, but it was hard to imagine how he couldn't have. Misa stood slowly, smoothing her dress back down over her legs. One of her stockings was unclipped and sagging, and one of her ponytails was loose. The left side of her face was red from dragging across the carpet. Light unlocked the door, opened it a slit, and said quietly, looking down, "Everything is alright now. Could you all please go back to the living room? I'm going to walk Misa out."

They had imagined their Christmas Eve being a disaster because of Light's cancer, but they had never imagined this. They nodded, dumbfounded and horrified, and slowly filed back down the stairs.

Light turned back to Misa. She was stony, with her hair and her stocking fixed. Ryuk had backed himself into the corner, and he was not laughing. "I'm sorry," Light said. "I'm sorry I hurt you, today, and every day that I called myself Kira. I'm sorry I dragged you into this. You didn't deserve any of this, and I can never apologize enough, and I can never make it up to you. I can only hope that one day you will find it in yourself to forgive me, and that you will have a long and successful life."

Misa stared back for a long while, and then she said, "You've changed."

"I gave up my memories," Light said, although something so obvious could not be what she was looking for.

Misa glared. "It's not that. You weren't like this even the first time you gave up the memories. And it's not L who's changed you, because he's never been like this. Who did this to you?"

Light sighed. "God, I don't know. I don't know, and I'm sorry. I never meant for any of this to happen."

"You're—" She frowned.

"What?"

"You're still crying."

Light wiped his face, feeling himself go red. "I'm sorry."

"I believe you," she said. "That's what's so strange."

As Light was seeing Misa off at the door, she stood on her tiptoes, reaching onto a little ledge near the entrance, and picked something up. She showed it to Light in the palm of her hand. It was a little wireless camera. "This is how I knew you were back. I'm taking this back because I won't depend on you anymore. If I get to be Kira again someday, I'm going to do it my way."

"I'm glad," Light said, sincerely. "I don't deserve to be a part of your life anymore."

She grinned at him, proudly. "You don't."

Light stood at the door until she and Ryuk disappeared into the night.

They couldn't just ignore what had happened, but no one knew for a long time exactly how to bring it up. Finally Sayu said, "So, I guess she was mad at you for having a new boyfriend."

Light shook his head. "She's not like that. It was something much more important, but that's her secret, and I think it would be unkind to tell her secret like that."

Thank goodness, their faces sighed. If it was a secret, it couldn't be talked about. They would never have to bring any of it up again. They made tea,

and they turned on the TV to a Christmas Eve program, but no one had anything to say. After two hours of this, Light said that he had better get back home. Back home. Because this wasn't his home anymore.

"Will you be back?" his mother wanted to know. *Before you die* was the unspoken part. *Will we hear from you before your funeral?*

There was a part of Light that wanted to incorporate them all back into his life. He wanted to have weekly family dinners, and he wanted them to meet L, and he wanted Watari and his father to get to know each other better, and he wanted his mother to make all her best desserts, and he wanted Sayu to get homework help from the world's three best detectives. But there was another part of him that knew that they weren't as strong as he wanted to give them credit for. It would make Sayu cry to meet L and like him and know that he and Light could not legally get married, even if they wanted to. It would make his mother afraid to have to worry every time Light interacted with his father that he was going to get disowned again. It would make his father ashamed to know that he wasn't able to support his son or save his life. And if it ever slipped out that Light had been Kira? He couldn't imagine. It would break them all beyond belief. They could barely stand having him here without his prochlorperazine. None of them would ever admit it, but they would rather ignore the cancer than recognize the impact it had on his everyday life. They were a wonderful family, and he would never hold it against them, but he knew their limitations, and he loved them enough to forgive them, and to not push them farther than they could go.

"I don't think so," Light said. They didn't protest, and that was all the confirmation he needed.

He spent a long time hugging each of them, saying that he loved them, and that he was glad he had gotten to spend Christmas Eve with them. His father was last, and when they pulled apart, his father kept one hand on his shoulder, and said that he wanted to walk his son to the door by himself.

This really meant that his father wanted a private conversation with him. They stepped out of the house and his father closed the door behind them.

"Well," his father said gruffly, taking a deep breath and puffing up his chest. "Well." He looked at him skeptically. "L? You're really...dating him?"

Light nodded. "Yeah, I am."

"And it's...voluntary?"

Why was this so hard for everyone to grasp? "Yeah, Dad. I love him."

His father winced. "Damn," he grumbled. "Matsuda was right."

Oh dear God.

Light's horror must have shown comically on his face, because his father grinned, chuckling. "Don't worry. I won't pretend I understand, but I'm not upset. And I could never disown you, not really. You don't know how much it killed me to lie to Sayu and your mother about that."

Light was well aware what an honest man his father was. "I know. I'm sorry you had to lie because of me."

"Don't apologize. I've never blamed you for any of this. It's that damn Kira's fault. And if it weren't for you, we would never have caught him."

It was technically correct. If it weren't for Light, they would never have caught Kira, because Kira would never have existed in the first place. But, in all the important ways, it would be a lie to agree. Light just looked at the ground. "I told you about L because I wanted to be honest with you," he said, "before I died."

He was tired of lying. He was tired of uncertainty. He wanted his father to know that he had been Kira, and to still love him, the way L knew and loved. He wanted his father to ask whether there was anything else Light needed to say.

But there was only silence. When Light finally looked up, he saw that his father's mouth was pressed in a thin line, and his eyes were filled with tears. Light's heart sank.

He knew. And he would never allow himself to believe it, for fear of what it would mean.

For the first time, Light found great reassurance in the fact that Watari knew that Light had been Kira and still wanted to be his father.

"Good night, Light."

"Good night, Dad."

When Light got back, the first thing he did was step past L and give Watari as big of a hug as he could manage without breaking the old man's back.

"What is this?" Watari asked, kindly, hugging Light back. "Are you alright?"

"I love you like a father," Light said, feeling childish, but meaning it all the same. "Thank you."

"Well," Watari said, sounding stunned. "Thank you. I... I love you as well."

Light pulled away, giving a watery smile, and L sidled into his arms, wanting a hug as well. "Hey," Light said. He kissed L's cheek, smiled at the way L smiled, and then kissed his cheek three more times.

"How was your visit?" Watari asked.

"It was...eventful, but good," Light said, still holding onto L and being held by him. They weren't usually apart for this long, and Light wondered whether L might have missed him. L didn't usually hold him like this in front of Watari. "I told them that I was dating someone of the male persuasion, my father figured out that this person of the male persuasion

was L—he didn't say L's name of course, he just choked on his chicken—Misa and Ryuk stopped by, and Misa attacked me." Watari's eyes were quite wide at this point. Wow, it had been more eventful than Light had realized. "But everything is alright now. The family things are good, and the Kira things are good, as soon as we burn this last piece of Death Note in my pocket. But I've said my goodbyes, I think. My family isn't ready to have me around, not like this. I realized how grateful I am to have you two as my family now. I can't think of anyone else I'd rather spend my last months with."

L held him tight and buried his face in his neck.

That evening, when Light joined L in bed, L was still on his laptop, presumably working. "Is that a case?" Light asked, getting under the covers and tugging at them to urge L to get underneath as well.

"No," L murmured, voice a little off, perhaps just because he was nibbling at his thumbnail. "I'm reading."

Light peeked over at the screen, which was filled with Greek. "What is that? *The Iliad*?" But he looked closer at the parts of the screen that were in English, and he saw that he was wrong. "You're reading the Bible."

"Mhm."

"Why are you doing that?"

"Listen to this. Ή ἀγάπη μακροθυμεῖ, χρηστεύεται ἡ ἀγάπη, οὐ ζηλοῖ, οὐ περπερεύεται, οὐ φυσιοῦται, οὐκ ἀσχημονεῖ, οὐ ζητεῖ τὰ ἔαυτῆς, οὐ παροξύνεται, οὐ λογίζεται τὸ κακόν."

Inconceivably, there were tears running down L's cheeks.

"οὐ χαίρει ἐπὶ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ, συγχαίρει δὲ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ· πάντα στέγει, πάντα πιστεύει, πάντα ἐλπίζει, πάντα ὑπομένει. Ή ἀγάπη οὐδέποτε πίπτει."

Light let the last echo of the Greek wash over him, and then he whispered, "What does it mean?"

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud, it is not rude, it does not seek its own things, it is not provoked, it does not keep account of wrongs. It does not rejoice in injustice, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always stays behind. Love never fails." L stared at the screen, slowly shaking his head. "The typical translation is that love never fails, but what it literally says here is that love never falls. Ἡ ἀγάπη οὐδέποτε πίπτει. Can you believe that?"

Gently, Light took the laptop, closed it, and set it on the bedside table. L sat with his eyes closed and his knees drawn up to his chest, and Light curled his body around him. "Yes," Light murmured, "I can believe that."

"Do you think any of us can really do it?" L asked quietly. "Do you think we can love like that?"

"I don't know."

They sat quietly together, in the dim bedroom Light, with L's tears drying slowly on both of their pajamas.

"I want to tell you something," L said, looking up.

"Hm?"

"I want to tell you my name."

Light's eyebrows shot up. "Do you want me to start calling you that? Because if your real name is, like, Luke, I don't know if I'm going to be able to take you seriously anymore."

L smirked. "It's not Luke, and I'm just telling you because I want you to know."

"Okay. Go ahead."

L whispered it in his ear.

Light frowned. "Say it again."

L did.

"That's your last name and your first name?"

"First name, and then last name."

"Your first name...is L?"

"I'm an orphan. We don't get very good names."

"Are you serious? And, wait, say your last name again."

L did.

"That... That's almost the same as my name."

"I know."

"How do you spell it?"

"L-a-w-l-i-e-t."

"Hm. That's strange. Are you sure that's how you pronounce it?"

L shrugged. "That's how Watari pronounced it, but he just read it off of my birth certificate."

"Oh my God. If I married you, my name would be Lawliet Light."

"Or I could just be Yagami L."

"Pfft."

L smiled for as long as he could, but soon his mouth started to crumple.

"What's wrong?"

"I love you," L whispered, "and I'm not ready for you to die, because I haven't shown you how much I love you yet."

"I know."

"You do?"

"Mhm. You love me as much as I love you."

L pondered that for a long moment. "Impossible."

"It's true."

"Somehow... Somehow, I believe you."

13. Chapter 13

Oh boy, oh boy. I was so good about updating for the first 12 chapters, and then I totally blew it. I'm so beyond sorry, you guys. This was an unbelievably hard ending to write, and some major experiences over the last few months has majorly majorly influenced it, and it ended up being a lot longer than expected, and it's the complete opposite of what I was planning on doing. Hopefully it'll be surprising to you guys, because it was surprising to me! You also get two chapters rather than one, so there's that. :) Thank you so much to everyone who sent me support and encouragement!

There was a question about how I think Lawliet should be pronounced. Obviously this is a contentious issue, but I think, because Lawliet with Japanese pronunciation is Rōraito (ローライト), and because Light with Japanese pronunciation is Raito, that it should be pronounced law-light. Hence why Lawliet Light would be so ridiculous. ;)

There was also a question about my religious background, since it comes up so much in this fic. I am a Christian, and I'm planning on going to divinity school or seminary after my undergrad and then getting a Ph.D. and going on to be a professor in theology, hence the interest. :)

I should note that, while it's not out of the question, I can't promise that I'll be writing any more Death Note fics. I've had an absolutely amazing time writing this, but it was also pretty long, and I haven't been truly in the fandom for a while. For more of my writing, I have several other DN fics up on my account, plus a novel on Amazon.

I don't own Death Note.

It was the new year, and Light was working on a new case, and he was wearing a new sweater that he and L had bought together on their New Year's date last week. Things were—well, they weren't good, but they were better, and he was happy.

But he was also sipping up the very last bit of his coffee, which had been the very last bit of coffee in the coffee pot, and he had forgotten to ask Watari to make more. Surely the old man was floating around somewhere though. Light wasn't even totally sure what his job was now that Light didn't need supervision and there wasn't a task force working with them. He knew Watari had been looking for a new place for them all to move into in the next month, but there was only so long you could spend looking at real estate, right?

"Watari?" Light half-shouted, hoping he wouldn't have to use the emergency cell phone just to get a fresh cup of coffee. He waited a few seconds, and then tried again, a little louder this time. "Watari?"

"He's not here." It was L, rolling back into the room on his chair, propelling himself along the wall with one hand, holding a stack of paper in the other hand. "He left an hour ago."

Light frowned. "He left? When will he be back?"

L shrugged. "Another hour? Two? I don't know which church he is going to, and I don't know how long their mass lasts."

"He's just at church? It's not even an emergency?"

L rolled to a stop in the middle of the floor. "You're getting spoiled, Light-kun. Watari can go out whenever he likes, emergency or not."

"Can he really?"

"Of course. Why would you think otherwise?"

"Well, what if it's in the middle of a work day?"

"A work day?"

"Yeah. I mean, he works for you, doesn't he?"

L frowned. "Watari? Work for me?"

"Doesn't he?"

"Of course not. What would give you that idea?"

"Um, I don't know, maybe the fact that he's around all the time and he helps you and feeds you and finds you cases and does all the things an employee would do?"

L thought hard, scooting himself forward on the chair, centimeter by centimeter. "I hadn't realized that was the impression you had of our relationship. Do you think the others thought that as well?"

"Are you saying you're the one who works for him?"

"Light, you don't understand. Watari adopted me."

Light was quiet for a long time, and then he said, "But you're twenty five."

"Yes, and I've been working on cases like this with him since I was nine."

Dear God. Light was eighteen and he still sometimes had trouble working on cases like this. He knew that the name L had been around for a while, but he hadn't connected the dots to recognize how young L must have been when he started, or even that *that* L had been *this* L the whole time.

L continued, "Watari...acquired me from my previous adopted mother, under rather questionable circumstances, and he effectively, though not legally, adopted me."

"So when Watari talks about you as his son, he really means it."

"Yes, of course."

"And when he talks about *me* as his son?"

"Yes, he really means it. Son-in-law, son and brother in Christ, all those things."

Light's eyebrows flew up. "Son-in-law?"

L shrugged, his mouth quirking warmly. "Son-not-in-law then."

"Hm."

"Honestly, I'm surprised you didn't figure it out on your own. All the pieces were there. I even told you I was an orphan a couple weeks ago."

"I try not to speculate too much about your past, because I figure you'll tell me when you're ready. Besides, I don't like thinking about you like you're a puzzle. It makes me feel like Kira."

L startled. "You remember what it felt like to think like Kira?"

Light shook his head. "Not at all. But Kira was me, so Kira had to think like I would, at my best and at my worst."

"Hm. This work that you're doing, puzzling out these cases... Is this making you feel like Kira?"

"Oh, not at all. Kira would never do this. This makes me feel like you."

L's brow crumpled, concerned, and for the first few seconds Light couldn't figure out why.

Then he added, "That means this makes me feel good."

Ah, there was a smile. "Really?"

"Mhm."

L beamed at that, and finished scooting over to his desk to get back to work. And maybe it was because his self-confidence had been boosted that he was daring enough to then ask something so inconceivable: "Light-kun, did it bother you that we didn't go to a temple for the new year?"

"Hm?"

"A Buddhist temple, to celebrate the new year. Did it bother you that we didn't go? I didn't even ask if you wanted to go."

"L, you know I'm not religious."

L hummed, noncommittally.

"What?"

"You're allowed to change your mind. Many people do, in either direction, eventually."

Light snorted. "I'm not going to change my mind just because I'm *dying*."

"I'm not suggesting that you should, and I'm not suggesting that it would be because you're dying. I'm just saying, try and tell me that you still believe that there is no supernatural aspect to our world after meeting a shinigami first hand."

"Try and show me any world religion that has predicted the existence of the kind of shinigami that we saw."

"Plenty of world religions posit the existence of spirits, evil or otherwise."

"So, maybe one of them is right, and maybe none of them are right. This changes nothing. I don't understand why you're so insistent about this."

L didn't have to be silent for very long for Light to realize that he was missing something.

"L, did it bother *you* that we didn't go to a Buddhist temple to celebrate the new year?"

Very slowly, L said, "I don't know. I think I would have liked to have done *something*."

"Something?"

"Something...religious. I think I would have liked that."

Light sighed louder than he had intended.

"What?"

"L, if this is because I'm dying—"

"Don't be so egocentric. Most things are about you nowadays, but not everything."

L had snapped, which meant that this was important to him. Light did not sigh at all this time. Instead, he remained silent, and turned back to his work.

L had come to bed late, when Light had already been drifting off, and now by the time Light was creaking out of bed, shivering off a nightmare, L was already showered, dressed, and sitting on the balcony.

"Hey," Light murmured, kissing the top of his head, then moving to take a seat on the bench beside him.

"Mm," L hummed amenably, his gaze not slipping away from the skyline. He looked quiet and reflective, but not upset. There was even a cup of coffee in his hand that looked more like coffee than milk.

"Hm?" Light asked, and L relaxed his grip just enough for Light to take the coffee for a sip. "Hm," he grimaced, but not with as much feeling as usual. This might have been the first time all the sugar had had the chance to actually dissolve. "Well." He handed the coffee back.

L smiled. "Thanks." And he leaned his head on Light's shoulder and Light slung his arm around him. They sat in quiet silence for several minutes, and then L said. "My dream changed."

Light arched a brow. "Hm?"

"You remember it, don't you? I mean, this wasn't one of the memories you lost, was it?"

Light had to think hard, but eventually he said, slowly, "Yes, I remember. But I don't know why you told me, or how I responded to it."

"Do you remember how the dream always ends?"

"Yes." L was waiting expectantly, and Light sighed. He didn't like thinking about what L had to deal with every night, much less relating it. "You've been shot—or, rather Charles has shot himself, but you're the one bleeding. You ask Watari for help, but he walks away instead, and then you wake up."

"As usual, Light-kun, you're forgetting the most important part."

"As usual?"

"Before Watari walks away, he looks straight at me and he asks me, 'L, what have I taught you about justice?' And then I let myself bleed out, and then I hear but do not see Watari walking away, and *then* I wake up."

"Alright. So, what changed?"

"I didn't wake up. The dream kept going."

"Hm."

"I heard Watari's footsteps, but then I saw that he wasn't walking away at all. He was walking towards me. And he knelt down beside me, and he put his hand softly on my head, and he said, 'L, that is not the right answer at all. If that is what I taught you about justice, then I was wrong.' And *then* I woke up."

Light breathed out heavily. "Wow. I can't say that's too big of a change, but it is a slightly better ending, I suppose. Do you still die in the dream?"

L shrugged.

"What do you think it means?"

L shrugged, and he drank from his coffee cup.

"Well, it obviously means something, if *this* is anything to go by."

L didn't play dumb. He knew that something was different as well.

Light seized again. This was significant for two reasons. First, it happened while he was in the shower, which hadn't ever happened before. Second, he had already seized yesterday.

"Shit," he wept, once the seizure had ended. He had managed to crawl out of the shower, so he wouldn't have accidentally fallen and drowned, and now he was on his hands and knees and face, weeping into the bathroom tiles.

Having a seizure more than once in a seven day period. That was what the oncologist said would mark the beginning of the bad months. He had been able to have two full good months, but this had crept up on him suddenly. God, he wouldn't be having a seizure every day now, would he? He couldn't breathe with the fear.

L didn't hear. The shower was still on.

But L *was* paying attention, and he got nervous before too long. Light took long showers sometimes, but this was getting ridiculous. He knocked on the door, while Light was still curled up on the floor, naked, tears drying.

"Light-kun?" he called. His voice was high, tight, afraid. At least Light wasn't the only one. "Are you alright?"

Light didn't reply, and L opened the unlocked door.

He rushed to Light first, to check that he was breathing and conscious, and then sighed, and kiss kiss kissed the top of his wet shampoo-y head. He turned the shower off.

"We have to go to the oncologist," Light said.

L didn't say a word, and Light knew that he understood. He almost started crying again with the relief that he wouldn't have to explain himself.

"Goddammit," the oncologist said when she walked in, and she walked right back out.

When she came back, there was no sign that she had been upset, but for the faint indentations in her forehead from her fingernails. She folded her arms over her chest, shook her head, and said, quietly, "I apologize for being unprofessional. I reacted the way I did because you want to live. This is the first time, in all the time that I've seen you, that you've wanted to live, not just for a few extra months, but forever. But the reason that you've come in is so that I can help you die, as comfortably as possible."

L stiffened, visibly, almost shaking.

"Well," Light sighed, nervous, tugging at a stray thread on his sweater, "at least I'm not suicidal anymore."

She hummed. "There is that. Speaking of which, any advice for my patients who still are?"

Light sobered, and considered it seriously. "Have seizures," he finally said. "Do philosophy—good philosophy, none of this nihilism shit. Be loved."

She nodded, taking the advice with exactly the same dose of seriousness. "Thank you." Her mouth compressed briefly. "So, I was right. You do want to live, for good."

"If treatment had any chance of working," he said, "I would do it."

"Even at the expense of your hair?" L murmured. He was biting deeply into his thumb, and not looking at anyone.

"Yes, of course," Light said. "Even at the expense of my intellect, really."

L flinched, and pulled his thumb out from between his teeth. Blood was welling around the cuticle. His eyes met Light's. "Marry me," he said. "Will you marry me, please?"

"Good Lord," Watari said, fondly.

"Finally," the oncologist said, and her voice broke.

While Watari picked up Light's prescription, they sat in the back corner of a café and ordered coffees for lunch.

"Let me get this straight," Light said, wrapping his hands around his cup, trying his very hardest to not freak out. "You want to marry me, in a country where we cannot get married, when I am not an adult, even though I will only be alive for another two to four months?"

L emptied another creamer into his coffee, and said, "Yes."

"*Why?*"

"Because I love you," L said, "and because it seems like the right thing to do."

"Right according to who?"

L frowned briefly, and said, slowly, "Right according to me, I suppose."

"That's not true. Not once have you ever suggested thinking anything like that."

"We're sleeping together, and we love each other," L said. "Why not?"

"Because it won't change anything. Besides, there's no way you're going to be able to handle wearing a ring. Some days you can't even handle wearing pajamas."

The ring thing was a legitimate concern, and L knew it. He frowned again.
"I'll wear it on a necklace."

"No, you won't."

"I'll get it tattooed on my finger."

Light smirked. "I might as well just wear both of them."

L lit up. "Is that a yes?"

"It won't change anything," Light insisted, leaning in. "Why can't this be enough?"

"Because, I want it."

"You want to be a widower at twenty-five?"

"If I have to be anyone's widower, I want to be yours."

"Won't this make it harder to—well, you know, find someone else, afterwards?"

L made a face at that. "I'd rather be a monk than be with anyone else."

They were slipping into teasing one another, but this was serious enough that Light reached over to take L's hand. "You're allowed to be with someone else, you know," Light murmured. "I would rather you be with someone else than be alone."

"Alone, or single?"

Light considered, and said, "Alone. There's nothing wrong with being single. But, if you fell in love, I wouldn't want to keep you two apart."

L was biting hard at his lip, upset by the very idea, and Light leaned over the table and kissed him, to make him stop.

"Please, Light-kun," L said, when they parted, holding tight to his hands.
"Marry me. I've been thinking about these things a lot lately, how to love you the best. And I think I've found someone who gives good advice, and I want to listen to him."

Light startled at someone secretly giving L advice. "It's not Watari, is it?"

"No, it's not."

"Will you tell me who it is?"

"Not right now, but one day, I promise."

L leaned forward, seeking, and Light kissed him, long and slow.

"Please," L said, resting their foreheads together. "Will you marry me?"

And Light breathed, and breathed, and said, "Yes."

They were going to England for the ceremony. L didn't care about it being legal. He just wanted it to be in his hometown, and he wanted Watari to be there.

Light had been taking levetiracetam for the past week, and it was a relief to know that it was helping. He had only had two seizures in the past week, and the side effects were just drowsiness and occasional faintness, which he could live with. The drowsiness was actually a bit convenient, because it usually hit at night when he was about to go to bed anyways. Usually this would have been incredibly inconvenient, because night was when he and L had their private time together. However, as it was, L had inexplicably decided that he wanted to stop having sex until they were married. It was easily one of the most ridiculous things Light had ever heard come out of L's mouth, but he really was pretty tired by the end of the day, and L wasn't opposed to doing all sorts of other things that were almost as good. So he was alright with waiting. Besides, it was making him look forward to it

more, and it meant that there was something truly wonderful waiting for him on the other side of this twenty hour flight.

Light didn't realize quite what a gift was waiting for him.

They weren't just going to L's hometown. They were going to his home. They pulled up to a crumbling English mansion surrounded by wrought iron gates, the car windows streaming with rain, and Light sat up straight, jolting L, who was resting with his head on Light's shoulder, and said, shocked, "Is this—?"

And L rubbed at his eyes, squinted out the windows, and said, "Oh. Yes, it is." And he laid his head back down on Light's shoulder, stiffer than before.

"Don't worry about the bags," Watari said, pulling the car around to the back of the mansion, where a garage door was opening. "I'll show you kids your room."

"No, I want to help," L said quietly. "Thank you for driving us, Watari."

Watari was audibly surprised. "Why, you're welcome. If you want to help, that would be very much appreciated."

L hummed.

The garage door closed, sealing out the rain, and they headed inside. It was strikingly similar to a hotel suite, consisting of a small kitchen, a living room, and two bedrooms with a bathroom each. Light headed for the bedroom on the right, starting to open the door, but L said, "The other one is mine, Light-kun." Only when Light was already at the other door did L correct, "Our room." The delay in the correction was well-warranted. The first room was very much Watari's, and the second was very much L's. It was only now that Light realized that the elaborate "L" and "W" designs and the tea sets and the formality of Watari's suits were not based on L's preferences, but Watari's. The right room, Watari's, had elaborate sheets and a massive rug and dark, sturdy furniture and paintings on the walls, whereas the left room, L's, had pale blue sheets and a single nightstand. Light was

reminded that neither of them worked for the other, and decisions about housing arrangements had to be made with actual dialogue and disagreements and compromise.

They were all tired and disoriented and jetlagged, so they went straight to bed, and L and Light curled up under the covers in just their underwear. Light thought for a moment about protesting that L at least put on some pants if he was so insistent about not sleeping together, but then he remembered how tired and faint he was, and he also remembered how cuddly L became with the addition of pajamas, and he decided that just the underwear was alright after all.

They held hands and tried to stare lovingly into each other's eyes, but their drooping eyelids kept getting in the way.

"Light-kun," L said, when Light had started drifting off.

Light's eyes fluttered open. "Hm?"

"Are you sure you want to marry me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because you want to get married, and because I love you."

L started. "You've only said that to me one other time."

Light frowned, sure it wasn't true. "That I love you?"

"No, *because* you love me."

Light arched a brow. "That's a very specific thing to remember."

"It's because you said it at a very important time. When I told you about my dreams, you told me about shinigami eyes, and when I asked why you would tell me so much, you said it was because you loved me."

Light frowned again, again quite unsure. "What are shinigami eyes?"

"Ohh. Of course you wouldn't remember." L briefed him, finishing with Light's hypothesis that B had shinigami eyes.

"Hm."

They were silent for a long time, and then L said, very quietly, "Light?"

"Hm?"

"Do you think that B having shinigami eyes was similar to possessing a Death Note?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, the torment." Light didn't even get the chance to frown before L was explaining. "You knew this, once, but Ryuk was the one who told me. When he was still trying to convince me to become Kira with you, I—well—just out of curiosity, mind you—I asked what the price was for using the Death Note. And he laughed and said that you had asked the same thing, and that he would tell me the same thing that he told you, that the price is the terror and torment that only humans who have used it will experience."

Finally, Light was following. "You're wondering whether the torment caused the suicide attempt."

"Mhm," L said, but there was more.

"You're wondering whether this means that you aren't at fault for his suicide attempt."

Courageously, L did not drop eye contact. He nodded.

Light considered it, seriously, and spoke, slowly. "I think that it's quite likely that the torment was responsible for the suicide attempt. But I think that even if the torment wasn't the cause, you couldn't possibly have been responsible."

"Was Watari responsible? Not completely, of course, but could he have done something to stop it?"

"I don't know. I don't know enough about the situation to know."

Then L did not ask, but said, "Charles is still my fault," and he had brave, staring, beautiful eyes.

Light thought hard, not about the answer, but about the words. He said, "I forgive you for killing Charles."

L processed, and then replied, "I forgive you for strangling me."

Light didn't have the energy to cry, but he did anyways, without sound.

L dried the tears with his thumb. "What about A?" he whispered. "A didn't have shinigami eyes, and A really did commit suicide."

Light kissed L's hand. "Sometimes people have torment anyways." Then his mouth compressed, and he said, softer, "You know, don't you, that at the end of the day, I killed B?"

L wrote love on Light's cheek, phi-iota-lambda-epsilon-omega. "I forgive you for being Kira," he said, "so long as you forgive me for almost being Kira with you."

The wedding was a quiet thing. There were no guests, and they locked the doors to the chapel to make sure of it. For his vows, L recited 1 Corinthians 13 in Greek. Light, feeling bad for not having prepared anything, snagged a nearby Bible, and read the same verses in English. L wasn't upset with the impromptu vows, if the quality of his kiss was any indication.

Light wore L's ring in addition to his own, just as he had suggested facetiously, both of them on his left ring finger. The reception consisted of eating cake and then dinner, catered so that Watari could relax too. While Watari was finishing up his second glass of wine, L said that he had an

announcement. "It's not a final decision," he said, tucked close into Light's side with his arm around his waist, "but out of courtesy to the both of you, I wanted to let you know that it was something I was considering."

"Go ahead," Watari said.

"I think," L said, "that I might want to try, rather than being a detective, finding ways to rehabilitate criminals."

Light's first thought was, *well, L can do anything*, but then he saw his left hand with the double wedding rings, and his second thought was, *actually, hold on*.

Watari spoke first. "Thank you for sharing that with us, L." He was doing a remarkable job of not looking alarmed. "I'm happy to help you pursue whatever it is you wish you apply your mind to. Perhaps you and Light can discuss this further during your honeymoon."

Now Watari was looking expectantly at Light, who managed, "Umm, yeah, we can talk about it. It could be neat."

Watari sort of winced, and reached to pour himself another glass of wine. In retrospect, it was probably not the most supportive thing he could have said. But how supportive did L expect him to be about this? It was even more ridiculous than the rush wedding, and unlike the wedding, it only got more ridiculous the more he thought about it. The three best detectives in the world all quitting simultaneously, just to help criminals live out the rest of their worthless days in comfort?

And then he realized how similar that sounded to something Kira would think, and he was so horrified that he got nauseous and nervous and quiet, and he forgot to say something to make his unsupportive response better.

Watari pushed his bottle of wine across the table, where L pulled it the rest of the way out of reach, and changed the subject. "L, do you want to see Roger at all before we leave? Or, perhaps, would you have any interest in

observing some students who are highest in the running for being your successor?"

L twisted his mouth. "Oh," he said, unexpectedly dryly, "has Roger purchased a housewarming gift for the two of us? Perhaps a set of twin beds?"

Watari's expression soured. "He'll want to see you regardless. You don't even need to tell him about the wedding if you don't want to."

"Haven't you already?"

"No."

"What does he think we're doing here?"

"He doesn't know. He's giving us our space, just like I asked him to."

L leaned harder into Light's side, stiffly, not to be closer to him, but to retreat from the conversation. "Hm. We'll see. Perhaps after the honeymoon."

14. Chapter 14

*I love you all to pieces. Thank you so much for sticking with me to the end.
:)*

I don't own Death Note or the writing of Fernando Pessoa.

It was a whirlwind tour of Europe—a slow whirlwind. They drifted from city to city, booking hotel rooms as they went, never staying in any given place for longer than two nights. They went to tourist sites and museums and pools. L taught Light capoeira, and Light encouraged L to try something different at every meal. They had breakfast in bed, and they made love afterwards, after Light had taken his pills but before the side effects had really started to kick in. They usually finished up their nights watching a movie, so that Light could fall asleep early but without making L feel like he was being abandoned. Sometimes they listened to an audiotape of a book instead. Often this made L fall asleep early as well.

They went sightseeing during the afternoons, though twice Light had a seizure in the middle of the day, which put enough of a damper on things that both times they ended up spending the day sitting outside and reading instead, usually to themselves, though sometimes to each other. While they were out sightseeing, every single time they passed a church, L slowed down and looked longingly at it, without saying a word. Once Light asked, "Do you want to go in?" but L was shaking his head vigorously before Light could even finish the question. So he let it go.

Halfway through the trip, while Light was going through L's bag to borrow a shirt—he had spilled marinara sauce on his last one—he found a hotel King James Bible tucked away next to L's underwear.

On the second to last day of their honeymoon, Light finally brought it up. "Sooooo," he said, while L was contentedly engaged in enjoying their recent purchases from a chocolate shop, "what's up with the whole, you know, Christianity thing?"

L took his sweet time finishing the enormous bite he had taken. After swallowing, not without a touch of drama, he asked, wide-eyed, "What Christianity thing?"

"I mean, the Bible thing, and the church thing, and the wedding thing."

L's mouth pinched, embarrassed. "You figured out the wedding thing?"

"Um, I thought it was kind of obvious."

"Well, I didn't know you knew."

"How could you not have known? Did you just tune me out completely?"

There was a moment of silence, and then L said, "Wait, which wedding thing?"

"The *wedding vows* thing."

"Ohh. So you didn't figure it out."

"What else is there to figure out?" Then it hit Light, and his jaw dropped. "NO."

Light really had figured it out this time, and L, with chagrin, went back to his chocolate.

"The person giving you advice is *God*?!"

L reddened, for the second time that Light could remember. "It's not so unusual. They don't have the Bibles in the hotels for no reason."

"But I thought you didn't believe in God," Light protested. "Not the Christian God, at least. I thought you said that it was too optimistic and no one could possibly think God was good in the face of all the suffering in the world."

"Light-kun, you're misremembering again."

Light sighed, sharply. "Fine. What am I misremembering?"

"I didn't say that I didn't think God could be good in the face of all the suffering in the world. I do understand the implications of free will. I said that I didn't think the world could be good in the light of all the suffering in the world."

"What's the difference?"

"It is a logical fallacy to believe that God is not good because His creation has chosen to not be good. However, it is valid to say that the world is not good based on observations of the world."

"So, what's changed?"

"I misunderstood the Christian perspective. It was Watari who helped me understand, whether or not he knows how much he helped me. We were having a discussion about your cancer, late one night, and I was irritated, not with him, though I took it out on him. I made a snide remark about how his faith would probably lead him to say something cruel about how your brain cancer was actually a good thing, because it was the only thing that could possibly have ever made you stop being Kira. But he looked shocked, rather than embarrassed. He said that he would never say such a thing. First, he said that he hadn't even made the connection between you having brain cancer and you not being Kira anymore. Second, he said your brain cancer was a terrible, terrible thing, and it was only because of God's love for you and for the world that He had made something so very good come from something so very bad."

Light was reeling, not because of Watari's response, but because of the idea that the brain cancer ended up making him stop being Kira. L had said it so casually, but it wasn't something they had discussed before. Was that true? What role had the brain cancer really played?

It was L's bet that convinced him to give up the memories, which was what had to happen for him to stop being Kira. It was the fact that Light was dying that made him even consider L's bet. And, moreover, it was the

seizure in the helicopter that had stopped Light from becoming Kira right then and there. It was only because Light hadn't become Kira in the helicopter that L ended up seeing the watch that implicated him. Without the brain cancer, he would have regained his memories, kept his identity a secret, and continued being Kira without threat of either death or capture in the way.

He was repulsed. The brain cancer as a good thing? What an utterly disgusting idea.

But no. L and Watari had said it wasn't a good thing. It was a terrible thing, but something good had come from it.

Was it really possible for anything good to come out of anything so sick?

Perhaps, if someone good was the one behind it all.

"Hm." Light scowled. "Hm."

"I don't expect you to agree with me," L said. "I just hope that you would understand."

Light sighed, shaking his head. And then he stuck his hand out for a piece of chocolate, an edible olive branch. L gave him a dark chocolate square and a tentative smile.

Light pocketed the chocolate in the corner of his mouth, and asked, kindly, "Is the criminal rehabilitation idea connected to this as well?"

L nodded.

"Do you want to say more about this?"

L slowly opened a new package of chocolates, formulating. Light finished his piece of chocolate, waiting. Finally, L said, sounding surprised at himself, "No, not right now, I don't think." He continued thinking, pulling at the label on the bag. "Can we go to the pool?"

"Of course."

They didn't mention it for the rest of the day.

On the last day of the honeymoon, they were back in England, though in London this time. They were wandering through the National Gallery, taking in the paintings quietly, holding hands and tugging gently at each other rather than speaking.

After an hour in the gallery, L tugged Light close to him and whispered in his ear, "Three young adults are following us." For a moment, Light was panicked, thinking that L meant perhaps that someone had found out his true identity and was trying to assassinate him, but then he forced himself to notice L's tone, which was simply one of curious amusement.

"Look," L said, and he tugged Light into the next room, rather quickly. They stood facing a painting near the entrance, so that Light could catch a glimpse of a little huddle of a girl and two boys, college age, whispering to one another nervously and glancing their way.

"What do you think they want?" Light murmured. L shrugged. "Should we try to lose them?"

L looked surprised. "Feeling anti-social?"

Now Light shrugged. "I usually dislike most people. I think it might be a problem."

"Hm, yes, I can't say that sounds too good," L said, but fondly, and he pressed a kiss to Light's cheek.

The conversation and the kiss apparently gave the huddle enough courage to actually approach. They edged over nervously, elbowing each other, until the girl spoke up.

"Hello how are you doing my friends and I have a question for you," she said in a rush, all with the same breath of air. She had a strong American accent, and Light wondered whether she was studying abroad.

"Sure, go ahead," L said, trying to smile welcomingly, but, if Light was being perfectly honest, mostly looking sort of creepy.

The girl did look more daunted after the smile. There was a moment of silence, and then the taller boy to her left picked up for her. "Ah, we're students at, ah, King's College, and we're, ah, well, we're Christians too actually."

L's eyes went wide. "Too?"

"Ah, yes, students and Christians too." Then it clicked. "Oh! So sorry, I didn't mean to imply that I thought *you* were Christians too. That is, you could be. I don't know anything about you. Well, *we* do. Really, *he* does..." He nodded towards the shorter boy, trailing off and going bright red in the ears.

"Yeah," the shorter boy said, with a lopsided smile and a deep voice. "See, we're charismatic Christians, which means that we believe that God does all sorts of miraculous stuff today, like talking to us and healing us and giving us visions and stuff. And I know this is going to sound crazy—"

"Weird," the girl hissed into his ear. "Not crazy. That's ableist."

"I know this is going to sound weird," he corrected, "but sometimes God talks to me and tells me stuff like that He wants me to talk to someone or do something. And about a month ago, God told me that He wanted to use me to heal someone of some stuff, and I've sort of been waiting around for the last month, looking around, waiting for Him to tell me who the person is." His smile got bigger, shyly. "I even started asking around, because I was getting impatient, but that didn't work obviously. And, like I said, this might sound crazy—or weird, but I think I finally found the person who God wants to heal."

L had gone very still. Light could hardly believe this was happening.

"He, ah, he means you, sir," the taller boy said, gesturing vaguely at Light and meeting his gaze. "Do you, ah— Is there anything you, ah, might need healing for?"

But before Light could say anything, the smile dropped off of the shorter boy's face, and he suddenly looked just as nervous as his friends. "Crap," he said, and the girl elbowed him. "You have brain cancer, don't you, mate?"

"Whoa," the girl gaped. "Do you really?"

L was frozen, despite the fact that he was the one who wanted to talk to these people in the first place, so Light dragged himself out of his sinkhole of disbelief and said, hoarsely, "Yes, I do."

The taller boy grinned hugely. "Wow! That's fantastic!" The shorter boy shot him a look, and the girl moved to elbow him, but he insisted, "No, it is! Not that you have brain cancer. That's pretty shit. I'm really sorry about that. But it's fantastic that God's gonna heal you today. Or, ah, tonight, I guess. That's usually what happens."

Light heard himself laugh, and realized how hard his heart was beating. "Usually?" he said. "You've done this before?"

"Well, we haven't," the girl said. "But our pastor has seen it happen. He says that with cancer, it usually is gone by the morning. Tumors sometimes shrink right away, but cancer is usually different."

"We've seen tumors shrink though," the taller boy said, as if to reassure them. "This girl in our church had the tumor in her shoulder shrink by eighty percent right away."

L stiffened even more, which Light hadn't realized was possible, and he knew what he was thinking. Even if Light's brain tumor shrank by eighty percent, it would still mean years of painful treatment and no certainty of survival and the continual chance of coming out of remission.

The shorter boy somehow must have noticed this slight movement, because he said, "But God is going to heal your cancer one hundred percent today, mate. I'm sure of it. I wouldn't say I was sure of it if I wasn't, because when it comes to this kind of stuff, I know what it's like to feel sure and I know what it's like to feel unsure, and I know that I feel sure right now."

"What if it gets worse?" L asked, unexpectedly coldly. "We're on our honeymoon. We don't have much time left anyways. Why should we trust you to not make it worse?"

Light couldn't believe L had mentioned the honeymoon to these Christians, and he couldn't believe L was suggesting that they not even try it. But they didn't so much as flinch, and Light found himself answering L's questions, "It's worth a shot," he said, in Japanese, because he was feeling self-conscious now. "I love you, and if I have a chance to maybe spend eighty more years with you, I'm going to take it. Besides, we wouldn't be trusting these kids, right? We'd be trusting their god."

L smirked. "Kids?" he echoed, of all things, still in Japanese.

"What?"

"You're eighteen. They're probably older than you."

"I'm almost nineteen."

"Almost." L turned to them and asked, in English, "How old are you?"

"Twenty."

"Ah, twenty-one."

"Nineteen, mate."

L turned back to Light. "See?" he said, in Japanese again.

"Fine," Light said. "Maybe I'm a kid too." And he added, teasing, "But you're an old man."

L's eyes went wide.

"Twenty five," Light reminded, smirking. "*Ancient.*"

"So, um," the girl interjected, "would it be alright if we prayed for you right now, um—? What's your name?"

"Light," L said, pronouncing it like the English word.

"That's your *name?*" she clarified.

Light nodded.

"Thanks, Light," the shorter boy said. "Usually when we pray for people to be healed, we put our hands on the part of the body that needs to be healed. So, for you, we would put our hands on your head. Would that be alright with you?"

Light nodded. They huddled around him, each person putting a hand on his head, just like they said they would. Even L reached up with the hand that wasn't holding Light's hand and joined in.

"Now we're all going to close our eyes," the shorter boy said, "and we're each going to pray out loud. You probably won't feel anything while we're praying, but tomorrow morning, your brain cancer should be gone. Alright?"

Light nodded, underneath all of their hands.

While they prayed, Light, rather than listening, was trying to figure out exactly how to be feeling about all of this. It was unbelievable that the shorter boy had known that he had brain cancer. Something bigger had to be going on. Unless they just went around asking everyone whether they had brain cancer and Light just happened to be someone who did. Or unless they were stalkers. Or unless he or L had happened to mention something about the brain cancer around them. Hm.

Well, Light doubted that anything *bad* could happen, like L had been worried about. After all, he only had a couple months left. At this point, it was basically all the same. And he highly doubted that something worse could happen, like demon possession or whatever. These kids—or whatever they were—seemed pretty normal and sincere. Realistically, the worst case scenario would be that nothing would happen and L would be crushed. Realistically, the best case scenario would be that the placebo effect would kick in and Light would have a little longer with L.

Ultimately, it was nothing to get too worked up about. But his heart was still pounding.

He forced his muscles to relax and his breathing to even. Everyone was so close to him that he was sure that they noticed him relaxing. He hoped none of them thought it meant that Light was feeling better. He didn't want to give them false hope. He had been a figure of false hope for quite enough time already.

"Amen," they chorused. Even L had said it, in a whisper. They pulled away.

"Do you feel any different?" L asked, in Japanese, probably because they had already said that Light wasn't supposed to feel any different.

"No."

"Excuse me." A nicely dressed older couple had stopped next to their group. "This is an art gallery," one of them whispered. "Please keep your voices down."

"Sorry," the girl whispered back, and the taller boy went red in the ears.

"Is there anything else we can pray for you guys about?" the shorter boy whispered.

"Not here, maybe," the girl said, "because—" She tipped her head towards the older couple.

"Right. But just anything we can pray for you about on our own time?"

"He's thinking about changing his job," Light volunteered, without quite knowing why he was bringing this up. L looked surprised, but not uncomfortable. "He's thinking of starting to help criminals with rehabilitation."

"I can pray for that one," the taller boy said.

"He has nightmares," L said, even more quietly than in a whisper.

"He does too," Light said.

"And what's your name?" the girl asked L.

Light expected L to use Ryuzaki or Ryuga Hideki or whatever the hotel thought his name was, but instead L pondered, and then leaned forward and whispered something in her ear. She looked a bit confused, eyes narrowing, looking him up and down, but she nodded. Had L really given her his real name? Oh, God, what if she thought that he had said Elle?

"I can pray for you both," she said.

"And maybe one more thing that I can pray about?" the shorter boy said.

"My...father," L said. "His health and his faith."

He nodded. "Alright, I can do that. Can I ask his name?"

L shook his head, understandably. It wasn't his secret to tell.

"Ah, alright, no problem. I can do that. Well, thank you guys so much for talking with us. We'll let you enjoy the rest of your honeymoon and the rest of your very long lives." That lopsided grin came back, and he winked.

They walked off, perfectly normally, waving, and L and Light continued through the gallery, still holding hands, even more quietly than before.

Light continued taking prochlorperazine and levetiracetam for the rest of the day, as discreetly as possible. The prayer wasn't actually going to do anything, but he didn't have to rub it in L's face.

Instead of watching a movie, they put on their softest pajamas and piled the covers high around them and talked. Tomorrow was a big day. They were going back to Winchester, to Watari, to real life.

"Are you going to visit Roger?" Light asked. He was already feeling sleepy, but he was determined to stay awake as long as possible for L, who looked very much awake.

"I think I will. I don't know exactly what I'll say to him, but I think he'll be more amenable to me since I've been—" And L cut off, looking embarrassed. "Well."

"Hm?"

"I suppose I should tell you. I—well, I haven't been making this a *completely* work-free vacation."

"What?"

"Once you're asleep, I take out the laptop and work on a project for Roger. I wanted to be on his good side, and I couldn't very well spend all this time doing nothing. You understand that."

Instinctively, Light understood completely. He recalled, months ago, L standing behind him in the bathroom, telling him he was bored out of his mind before he had even realized it himself, easing his clenched hands out of his hair. And yet—

"But I haven't done any work, and I've been fine."

L looked embarrassed again, but in a different way. "Best not to question it," he said, entirely unconvincingly.

"Why have I been fine?"

L's silence revealed that he had the answer.

"L, just tell me."

L bit at the skin around his thumb, which had just been starting to heal, and said, carefully, "We knew from the beginning that the cancer would impact your cognitive faculties. Your mind and body don't have to look for extra challenges considering all that they have to face every day."

L was dancing around the real issue. "I'm getting slower. I'm losing my edge." Light had to listen to his own tone to figure out how he was feeling. Numb, he decided. It was hard to process that this was really happening. Everything was hard to process lately. "I've been slipping so much that I haven't even noticed it until now."

And, with that, it was like he couldn't notice anything other than how *slowly* he was noticing everything. It was like molasses was clinging to every thought, and there was so much going on in the room and in the situation, and he was actively focusing on elements rather than absorbing them all automatically. He would usually be analyzing and planning and dissecting at all times in the back of his head, just in case, ready to pull the operations to the forefront if more focused work was required. But none of that was happening now. His mind was a quiet hum.

Before, L would never have been able to hide his work all this time. Light would have noticed something different about the laptop use, whether it was the battery level or the search history or the ads being shown or a ding in the side. He would have realized that there was no way L could have gone from snatching a few hours of sleep to sleeping all the way through the night. He would have realized that when they were reading together, sometimes L would spend up to half an hour on the same page, absorbed in other thoughts.

One of the things L loved most about him was his intelligence, and now that was slipping away. He didn't think he had ever felt so insecure in his life.

But L was as bright as ever, and he figured out what was going on at once. "Yagami Light," he said firmly, taking a hold of his left hand. "What is this?"

"Our wedding rings," Light murmured.

"We are on our *honeymoon*," L said, almost angrily. "You are not going to doubt that I love you right now."

"But—"

L kissed him, urgently, but the tears had already started tickling at Light's throat, and they showed themselves before long.

"No tears," L pleaded. "This doesn't change anything. Nothing is different. You're the same, and we're the same, and the world is the same. Make yourself believe me. It doesn't matter if you don't believe it, but believe me when I say that I am telling you the truth."

"This is my identity," Light said, throat tight. "This is who I am. Without this, I have nothing."

"You are incorrect," L said, so matter-of-factly that Light actually cracked a smile. L kiss-kiss-kissed his smiling lips. "You may think that is your identity, but you are incorrect. Your identity is much bigger and more eternal than something as flimsy as the way in which your neurons happen to fire."

They clung and shivered and kissed, with as much energy as Light could muster, lightheaded and breathless and drowsy and dizzy.

"You're brilliant," L promised, "in every sense of the word, no matter what happens. You're brilliant, you're brilliant, you're brilliant."

Light was no stranger to strange dreams, but he had never experienced anything quite like this.

Light without shadow. Eternity without monotony. Closeness without fear. Peace without ennui. Joy without end.

And he wasn't even afraid to wake up.

In the murky twilight between waking and sleeping, Light was feeling mischievous. He was aware enough of his own breathing to know that he sounded like he was asleep, and he was aware enough of L's breathing to know that he was awake. The possibilities were endless. He could sneak a peek at what L was reading or writing or calculating. He could surprise L with a kiss. He could tickle L. He could hum a Chopin etude and wait for L to figure out where the noise was coming from—but could he hum and keep his breathing steady at the same time? He hadn't slipped up so far, but even he had limitations.

Ah, but L was shifting, carefully, getting out of bed. He had missed his chance. Oh well. He sat up, blinking to clear his eyes, and smiled.

"Shit," L hissed, flinching and falling the rest of the way out of bed.

Odd. L must have really been engrossed to have been so surprised just by Light waking up. Light peeked over at the laptop screen, but it was just a year summary of criminal activity in Brazil. Boring. Maybe related to a case though, which would be interesting. Maybe they would even need to do some undercover work there, which would be fun. Light would get to brush up on his Portuguese, which he hadn't gotten to use on this trip, because he had had a seizure the day they had been planning to go through Portugal. What was that quote he used to love? Ah— Repudiei sempre que me comprehendessem. Ser compreendido é prostituir-se. Prefiro ser tomado a sério como o que não sou—

L was just standing up. What had taken him so long? Light was already planning their next reading project. L put a hand on his chest and smirked. It was that rare, natural smirk that didn't look creepy at all. In fact, it made Light want to pull him back into bed. "You startled me," L said. His fingertips were slowly brushing the covers as he deliberated whether to get

back in bed or do whatever he had gotten up to do. Probably use the bathroom, because anything else could most likely wait or be done from the bed. "I haven't seen you wake up so easily in— Well, since I was illegally videotaping your home, I suppose." Amazing how he really said it with no regret. Light wondered how many times he had done it, and whether he had ever felt uneasy about it, even if just the first time. "No nightmare?"

Light shook his head. "Go use the bathroom," he said, "and then we'll cuddle. Also, can we read Fernando Pessoa together?"

L's fingertips jumped back. "How did you—?" His gaze darted to the bathroom, to the laptop screen, and back to Light. His fingertips trembled, along with the rest of him, and he went chalky pale. In a choked whisper, he managed, "It worked." Shakily, he climbed back onto the bed and held Light's face in his hands, looking from one eye to the other, as if able to see through them into his brain. "It worked."

With L this close, Light was very aware of how much sharper everything was and yet also softer, clearer but less demanding, more detailed but more easily processed. From L's eyelashes to the sliver of clouded sky past the curtains to the faint thud of something falling in the next room to the light ache in his hungry stomach, everything was being absorbed quietly into his head, where it was easily sorted and channeled into its respective place without fuss. It was true. He had just woken up, and already he was thinking better than he had in months. They weren't out of the woods quite yet, but something had definitely changed for the better.

Light grinned, his cheeks slightly smooshed by L's hands. "Yeah, I guess it did."

And then L was laughing, like he had laughed in the bathroom all that time ago, and he was embracing Light with every part of his body that could, his arms wrapping around Light's shoulders, his legs twining into Light's through the covers, his head tucking into the crook of Light's neck. And he was saying through the laughs, "Thank you! Thank you, thank you, thank you! I love you, I love you, *I love you*. God, I love you so much."

For the rest of the day, L was all smiles and positivity and PDA. Light, with his newfound attention to detail, was acutely aware of the fact that L was glowing and charming and upbeat—only to him, because to everyone else, he was hunched and sloppy and clinging to Light too closely for their comfort—to everyone else, whose significant other was usually gossiping or yawning or preening or ogling someone else. Light held L closer, and remembered why it was that he hated people so much.

L, on the other hand, had never before expressed so much hope in humanity. He was an absolute chatterbox, and what he chattered about most was his plans for how to get started with criminal rehabilitation. That was what the Brazilian statistics had been for. He was trying to figure out which countries to work with first. He wasn't thinking of actually moving out of Japan, he assured Light, because he had a lot of research and thinking to do first, but he had to narrow down the focus of his investigation before he started working out any details. He was especially sympathetic to psychopaths, of all people, but he was concerned that he would have less success if he started with them. He was trying not to be too optimistic. If he helped even one person, he would be happy, he insisted. He wasn't trying to make up for Charles, he stressed, because there was nothing he could do to make up for his actions, but he certainly was trying to put his experience with criminals to good use.

He wanted to approach criminals with exactly the opposite mindset as Kira. He looked over at Light a bit nervously when he broached this topic, but Light smiled, softly, genuinely. It would do no good to ignore that he had been Kira, but he wasn't the same person as before, and it also would do no good to ignore that. L continued, that Kira saw two categories of people, the innocent and the guilty, the ones worthy of life and the ones worthy of death, but that he would see the two categories as the prisoners and the free, the ones apart from society and the ones a part of society. Kira wanted to separate the two groups of people, permanently, through death, but L would do his best to unite the two groups, bringing everyone into society together.

Then L shifted gears, focusing on Light's eyes directly. Light was very aware of the way that their palms fit together, the way that the wind was tugging at L's bangs, the way that their knees touched when the train bumped. "Do you still want to go to To-Oh University?"

Light hadn't had the chance to think about it, but he didn't have to think very hard before he said, "Yes."

"Do you still want to join the NPA?"

Surprisingly, this was even easier. "Yes."

The corner of L's mouth quirked up warmly. "Excellent. You'll take them off the streets, and I'll put them back on."

Light didn't take his medication all day. At lunch, neither of them even remembered to suggest it. Light hadn't felt healthier in over a year.

When they told Watari, he wept like a child. He hugged them both with surprisingly powerful arms, and wouldn't let go for fifteen minutes.

Light was excited to meet Roger, a figure who had been so important in L's childhood, but he was more than slightly less excited when he reached out his right hand for Roger to shake, but Roger was too distracted by the ring on Light's left hand to shake his right hand. L had been wearing his wedding ring all day, and while Roger was busy now staring at L's left hand, Light slowly dropped his right hand.

They sat, Roger on one side of his desk, L and Light on the other side, like they were in trouble.

L said, "We have some really good news for you, Roger. Three Christian students prayed for Light to be healed, and now his brain cancer is gone."

Roger said, "Should you really be using my name in front of him?"

L said, "I'm sorry."

Roger said, "Have you done tests yet?"

L said, "No, not yet."

Roger said, "Hm."

L said, "What did you think of my recommendations for my successor?"

Roger said, "Watari tells me that you are refusing to be L anymore."

L said, "I'm still L. My job will just be slightly different."

Roger said, "L is a detective. You are refusing to be a detective. You are refusing to be L."

L said, "My *name* is L, so whatever I do will be—"

Roger said, "Should you really be saying your name in front of him?"

L said, "We're *married*."

Roger said, "If you call that a marriage."

L said nothing.

Roger said, "This is bigger than you. You have to stop being so selfish. Think of what you're going to be doing to the name of L. What is the world going to do if it finds out that you're releasing criminals, practicing homosexuality, and sleeping with Kira?"

L stood.

Roger said, "You've done many disappointing things in your short life, young man, but this is by far the most disappointing."

L said, "I am and always will be L. I am twenty-five years old, and I will not be cowed by you. You may call my successors what you wish, so long as you do not call them L. I sincerely hope that you have not made it a habit of speaking to my successors in the way that you speak to me, for their sake and for Watari's sake. I do love you, Roger, but I'm going to make my own decisions now."

Roger said, "If you really loved me, you would do as I say."

L said, "If that is what you think love is, you have a lot to learn."

L held Light's hand on their way out.

The oncologist had never seen anything like it. The brain cancer was one hundred percent gone. It was like it had never even been there. She kept them there for two hours, demanding to know anything that could have caused it to disappear like that, asking what they had eaten, where they had gone, whether they had been near any radioactive materials or animals. They kept telling her that it was because of the prayer of the three students, but she wouldn't take that for an answer. She took three more CT scans, and then she sent them away.

Inexplicably, L started getting better too.

Light woke up one morning to breakfast in bed—which was to say, coffee and a piece of toast in bed—and a very snuggly L. Light didn't even have to ask before L was telling him the answer.

"My dream changed again," he said. "I don't want to be too optimistic, but I wouldn't be surprised if I never have the dream again."

Light's eyebrows rose. This was some serious news. "The last time your dream changed, you said that it continued. Watari was actually walking towards you, and putting his hand on your head, and saying that your

answer was not right at all, and that if that was what he taught you about justice, then he was wrong."

L held him tighter. "Your didn't misremember."

"Finally I've done something right. So, what changed this time?"

"It continued again. When Watari put his hand on my head, I put my hand back to the bullet hole, but there was suddenly no blood coming out of my head at all. I thought perhaps this meant that all the blood had left my body, because there was warmth all underneath my body, warm blood, I assumed. But it wasn't blood at all. What I was lying on was uneven and soft, and I rolled off of it. It was a body. I was lying on someone's body, someone's *dead* body. He was very dead, and all the blood had actually come from him, from his head and back and wrists and side and feet. Somehow, the damage that B had meant for me with the piano and that Charles had meant for me with the gun had all hit him instead. Watari was still there, and he put his arm around me, and we wept. I didn't even know who the man was, but I was grieving. For a long time, it was just me and Watari, weeping, with the body in the prison cell.

"But then everything changed. I heard a voice say, 'Why are you crying?' Watari and I looked up, and there was the man, standing beside us. His clothes were white and clean, and his body was brown and clean, without a trace of blood anywhere. Watari moved towards him first, but I reached him first, taking his hand. He was very much alive and well, but there were still holes in his wrists. Watari took his other hand. Watari's suit had turned white, and my jeans had turned white and my shirt even whiter. He led us towards the prison doors, which crumbled to pieces the moment he touched them. We walked out of the prison into the light, and I woke up."

Light absorbed, and processed, and kissed L's forehead. "So, you think that's the end of the dreams."

"Mhm. Because I think the person who healed me was the same person who healed you."